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Curriculum Decision Making in Religious Education in Five
English Secondary Schools at Key Stage 3

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For Ayla, Berryn and Idris

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Signed

No part of this thesis appears in any publications.

Abstract

Knowing how teachers plan the curriculum for pupils is essential to understanding how they view the nature and purpose of education in the contexts that they find themselves. With the development of the academies programme and Free Schools, where teachers are encouraged to be creators of curriculum, this task has never been more urgent.

This study took five secondary teachers of religious education (RE) in English schools and looked at how they planned their subject for pupils in Years 7 and 8, with a focus on the latter. Using repertoires of action research the study looks at the underlying educational beliefs of teachers, their own personal histories and context of their school to produce comparative case studies. The comparison of case studies identified common themes and significant difference of approach set against the expectation that might be had of those teachers who were trained RE teachers and those who were not. Three of the schools in this study were non-denominational schools and two Church of England secondary schools, allowing a comparison of teachers in shared and different contexts.

The approach taken in the research is embedded in the Critical Realist tradition and it looks to discover the underlying cultural structures that have an impact on teachers internalised worldviews. It explores how understanding cultural structure can better enable researchers to see its impact on real decisions made by teachers.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Context

The research presented in this thesis was undertaken at an interesting time for education in England. Many of the certainties that came as a result of the 1944 Education Act (the nature of maintained schools) and the 1988 Education Reform Act (the National Curriculum, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and Ofsted) have either disappeared or have been changed beyond recognition. The White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (2010) and the technical paper that accompanied it, *The Case for Change* (2010a), set in motion what has now been almost a decade of change. This has been a decade in which many schools have become independent of their local authorities by choice or as a result of government intervention, and given the freedom to construct their own curricula.

The research is also presented at a significant time for religious education (RE) in England. During the period covered by this research, Clarke and Woodhead (2015) called into question some of the fundamental assumptions made about RE that came from the 1944 Education Act (Standing Advisory Councils for RE and Agreed Syllabus Conferences), as reformed by the 1988 Education Reform Act. Their call to take syllabus responsibility for RE away from local authorities was not new (Ofsted 2007; 2010; 2013) but came with the authority of a former Education Secretary and Privy Councillor. The baton was taken up by the RE Council of England and Wales (REC) when it announced in 2016 that it was establishing a Commission on RE for England. In 2017, the Commission (CoRE) produced an interim report followed in 2018 by the final report. The final report called for a dismantling or reforming of the structures that had both determined and supported RE since 1944, and a change in both the name and focus of RE, it becoming Religion and Worldviews. Since that time the REC has been working to see that government adopts the Commission's recommendations. Whether they will be successful remains to be seen, given the other political priorities facing the government of the day.

Within this context there are teachers who are expected to carry on and do the job of teaching and, in some cases, expected to plan programmes of study for their pupils. Historically, secondary teachers of RE have generally ignored agreed syllabuses

(Ofsted 1997a; College of St George 2016), which was seen as a reason for low standards at KS3 by Ofsted (1997). However, since the early 2000s Ofsted stopped inspecting curriculum subjects as a matter of course, and subject survey inspections ended in 2013. The final report (Ofsted 2013: 5 – 6) found:

- Achievement and teaching in RE in the 91 secondary schools visited were only good or better in just under half of the schools. The picture was stronger at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3.
- The quality of teaching in the secondary schools visited was rarely outstanding and was less than good in around half of the lessons seen. Common weaknesses included: insufficient focus on subject knowledge; an over-emphasis on a limited range of teaching strategies that focused simply on preparing pupils for assessments or examinations; insufficient opportunity for pupils to reflect and work independently; and over-structured and bureaucratic lesson planning with a limited focus on promoting effective learning.
- Around half of the secondary schools visited in 2011 and 2012 had changed, or were planning to change, their curriculum provision for RE in response to changes in education policy. The impact of these changes varied but it was rarely being monitored carefully.

Interestingly, there was no judgement about how the curriculum as a whole was planned for RE in these schools other than the recommendation that secondary schools should ‘ensure that the overall curriculum provision for RE is challenging and has greater coherence and continuity.’ (Op.Cit 8).

More recently the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE 2017: 5 – 6) reported that:

- 28% of secondary schools told the Department for Education that they gave no dedicated curriculum time to RE. It is estimated that this equates to 800,000 pupils being deprived of their legal right to learn about major religions and beliefs, leaving them without the religious literacy they need for life in modern multi-faith Britain.

- The level of provision of RE is largely dependent on the type of school pupils attend, leading to widespread variation across the country.
- Schools with a religious character typically make a higher level of provision of RE, suggesting that these schools place a higher priority on the subject than other types of school.
- Schools following a locally agreed syllabus for RE tend to have higher levels of provision than academies, but lower than schools of a religious character. At Key Stage 4, 45% dedicate 3% or more of their timetables to RE. As these schools convert to academy status and are no longer required to follow their locally agreed syllabus, there is a real concern that their level of RE provision may drop.

The overall picture for RE at Key Stage 3 (KS3) was not encouraging.

The research question in the context of RE in England

The research undertaken for this thesis sought to investigate something that neither Ofsted nor NATRE had covered in their reports, that is, how teachers go about planning RE in KS3. It looks at the curriculum plans of five teachers in five different schools, two denominational and three non-denominational, and investigates how those plans came about. It does not look at the implementation of those plans, or at their effectiveness, but aims to make sense of the plans. The primary question was framed as:

How is the decision about what to teach in religious education at Year 8 made in five English secondary schools?

The focus is on Year 8 rather than Years 7 or 9 or KS3 as a whole. When the research was planned many secondary schools in the area where it was to take place did not deliver RE as a subject on its own in Year 7 and increasingly schools were starting GCSE in Year 9. Year 8 offered the opportunity to look at ‘pure RE’ as conceived by the teacher. On the basis of Ofsted’s previous reports on RE, from 1997 to 2013, there was also another unique opportunity. There was no National Curriculum for RE and, if Ofsted was correct, secondary schools would be unlikely to follow a locally agreed

syllabus. Unlike teachers of other subjects where the curriculum had been set these teachers would be creating curriculum. It could be hypothesised that the RE curriculum that they developed would be an expression of what they believed to be most important for their pupils. However, RE, like all curriculum subjects, is part of a broader tradition, going back into the 19th century. The unique product of these five teachers should, if the hypothesis was correct, reveal something about them as they approached the task. It should also reveal something about the specific time and place that shaped the programmes of study they produced. So the research developed an epistemologically diverse approach to answering the question; one that involved different sources of data that could be triangulated to give a picture of the whole and to highlight any anomalies.

The research is a snap shot, taken over two years for four schools and three years for one school. It cannot be claimed that these schools are representative or form a valid sample. However, it is a starting point for further conversations and research. It identifies some common themes and it situates the teachers in the broader context of RE in England. At the end of the thesis, I argue not only for the unique contribution that the research makes but also recommendations for further research.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2

In chapter 2, I present the research context and take the reader on the journey that led to the framing of the research questions. Whilst the chapter follows a general chronological sequence, at times it deviates from that in order to develop a theme that was visited on more than one occasion.

I divide the chapter into several sections. Starting with research I had previously undertaken into secondary RE teachers, I move on to the broader context of RE in England. Here, I consider how RE has always been problematic in state funded schools, starting with the 1870 Education Act and Cowper-Temple clause and follow a thread that culminates in the 2018 CoRE report almost 150 years later. The chapter goes on to look at the issue of what it means to be an RE professional and how that is inflected by the debates about what it is to be a teaching professional, including the

issue of teacher agency and how that can be understood. This is followed by a consideration of the issue of culture, and how we identify what this is. I also look at the broader context in light of research on RE across the Council of Europe area, as religious education is not simply a matter for England and developments and research there can shed light on the decisions that teachers have made in this study. The chapter informs the methodological and analytical approaches taken later in the thesis.

Chapter 3

Following the research context, I set out my methodological approach, taking into account ontology and epistemology. I consider the critical realist approach adopted, which informs my research paradigm. I discuss how I developed the methodology through a pilot study and how that shaped the case study approach, informed by repertoires of action research. The chapter goes on to look at how I constructed comparative case studies and then how I went about data collection and data analysis. I set out how I used the data to re-examine the theoretical underpinnings of the research to identify the social processes at work in the act of curriculum planning. It is in this chapter that I address the issue of researcher ethics and bias.

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, I present three of the five case studies, all of which are set in non-denominational schools. Each case study follows the same pattern:

- Introduction to the school and the teacher
- The teacher's personal history, divided into personal and professional
- The school and its defining features, including demographic data
- Religious education in the school, including the curriculum plan
- A discussion
- The conclusion

Chapter 5

Here I present two case studies, both of which are set in Church of England Academies, previously, Voluntary Aided schools. The case studies follow the same

pattern as the non-denominational schools to allow comparison between each other and the schools considered in Chapter 4.

Chapter 6

In Chapter 6 I turn to analysing the data from the perspective of repertoires of action research. I focus on three of the four areas of interest for repertoires of action research: history, beliefs and values, and the cluster of circumstances. Here I test the use and validity of repertoires of action research as described by Carmin and Balser (2000) and Fincham et al (2011) and consider how they can provide an explanatory narrative for the ‘action’ and ‘product’ of curriculum planning.

Chapter 7

The penultimate chapter brings the thesis back to the research paradigm, the critical realist approach as presented by Margaret Archer (1995). Within the chapter I apply the morphogenetic sequence Archer develops in response to Giddens’ structuration theory and Bourdieu and Passeron’s theory of social reproduction.

In my analysis I use Archer to identify cultural structure as it applies to schools, with particular reference to neo-liberalism and how we can understand the broader impact that that has on the study of teachers. The chapter also explores the issues of agency highlighted in Chapters 2 and 3. Using Archer (1979; 1995) I employ her T¹ cultural structure, T² – T³ social interaction and T⁴ social elaboration categories for analysis, although I term T⁴ as ‘towards social elaboration’.

Chapter 8

The final chapter draws the research together by returning to the research questions. It summarises the key findings, identifying how they work at micro, meso and macro levels. I go on to make recommendations on the basis of the findings; the implications of the research for policy and practice, indicating where I believe future research should focus.

I conclude by looking at the unique contribution that the research makes to the field of the study of RE.

Technical information is contained in the appendices that follow the final chapter.

Chapter 2: Research context

Introduction

This chapter places the thesis within the context of a number of fields of research that contribute to the understanding of how teachers undertake the process of planning religious education in the secondary phase, with a focus on secondary RE teachers. In the first section I consider some of the conclusions and questions that arose from my Masters dissertation (Hampshire 2011), which looked at the impact of teachers' academic backgrounds on their teaching of RE, and how they informed the research question for this thesis. I will then go on to look at the literature that relates to teachers' agency and curriculum planning, which shaped the way that the research developed and the conceptual framework in which the thesis is situated. In this section I focus on the problem of curriculum planning, taking into account 20th century concepts of the teacher as curriculum planner and the impact that the 1988 Education Reform Act, the introduction of the National Curriculum, QCA and Ofsted had on teachers' planning. From there, I explore the issues that arose in the early 21st century, when curriculum creativity was promoted by the QCA and how changing context was driven by particular concerns in government. I conclude with the context from 2010 onwards and the Coalition government's policy framework. Finally, I look at the broader European research on religious education.

The impact of teachers' academic backgrounds

In 2008, I began an MA in Religious Education. When I was choosing my dissertation research area the coalition government published two key documents, the White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) and the technical paper *The Case for Change* (DfE 2010a). I made the decision to research the impact of the academic background of secondary RE teachers on their teaching in RE. The government had put forward a model of what it is to be a teacher where a person goes to university, becomes enthused by their studies and develops a deep desire to transmit culturally significant and valuable knowledge to the children and young people and therefore becomes a teacher. Within this model it is not necessary to train

to be a teacher, passion seems sufficient. Whilst teachers in maintained schools were required to be qualified, the extension of the Academies programme and innovation of Free Schools had no such requirement. Consequently, I decided to investigate if the model put forward by government worked for RE.

One of the issues that I identified was that the linear model of progression from degree to PGCE to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) did not work well for RE teachers. Cush (1999) identified this issue well by highlighting that RE in schools is a bringing together of a number of academic disciplines. Whilst there is a logic to thinking that the subject of Mathematics in school is not dissimilar to that subject at university this is not true for RE. Historically there had been secondary degree courses in RE, such as B.Ed and BA (QTS) courses, however these were phased out before the millennium. As a result of a crisis in the recruitment of secondary RE teachers in the late 1990s, the Culham Institute appointed Dick Powell, in 2001, to work with universities to encourage graduates to consider RE teaching as a career. The strategy was designed to bring in graduates from non-traditional routes to RE teaching, such as Law. This led to a situation reported on by RE Council (REC 2007: 26):

‘Entrants to RE teacher training via PGCE, GTP and Humanities routes come with a wide range of degree backgrounds and therefore diverse gaps in subject knowledge. Even those with Theology/RS or related degrees have not necessarily developed the breadth of subject knowledge required for teaching RE according to the Non-Statutory National Framework for RE and to local authority agreed syllabuses.’

The REC report highlighted research which showed that 95% of schools had at least one full time equivalent RE specialist, whilst 78% of teachers of RE had no specialist background in the subject.

My Master’s research showed that those with Religious Studies degrees felt comfortable teaching RE as a subject, but this was less true for those with degrees in Theology, Philosophy or Sociology. The latter relied on the quality of their PGCE to give them the subject knowledge needed to deliver RE confidently. Post qualification research via the Internet had the greatest impact on teachers’ knowledge for teaching,

but this was unstructured and fraught with difficulties of voice; such as, teachers not being able to judge the authenticity or representativeness of on-line resources.

I concluded that *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) had failed to take into account Beck and Young (2005) who looked at the way that degrees themselves had changed in nature with the introduction of the new sociology of knowledge that appeared in the 1970s. Their argument was that if a person took a degree such as Theology (my example) up to the 1970s in any university offering that degree, there would be a commonality of knowledge to be acquired and standards to be achieved. Beck and Young argued that the restructuring of degrees led to an assault on the professions, effectively restructuring academic and professional identities. In 2006 – 2007 I supported the launch of a resource for schools on the Bible and the Environment. I worked with a group of 21 ITE students on a module relating to the Old Testament and the Environment, 10 of the students had degrees in Theology and Religious Studies, and of those only one had studied the Old Testament as part of their degree. That student was the only person who had also studied a Biblical language as requirement of their degree. As Beck and Young point out, the presumption of knowledge could not be assumed from the degree course graduates had completed.

It was clear from my research that teachers were making curriculum decisions in RE taking into account a number of factors. Two of these were particularly significant for the development of the research for this thesis. Firstly, teachers leading RE engaged in acts of compromise where they shared responsibility for the RE curriculum offer and where there were a significant number of non-specialist teachers delivering the programme of study. Their main concern was not alienating other teachers, as that would cause them problems as heads of RE. The worst scenario would be to find themselves in a situation where teachers simply requested not to teach RE at all because they felt ill equipped to deliver the content that the head of RE thought was important for pupils. This led to a curriculum offer that was not challenging for teachers or did not require them to engage in further study that they might resent. Secondly, teachers did not want to make RE too challenging for pupils. There were two reasons for this: alienated students would be problematic to teach and it may put off pupils opting to do full course GCSE RS. Teachers' aspirations for pupils learning

by the ages of 14 and 16 were relatively low and at times unrealistic. An example of the latter was when a teacher wanted their pupils to be able to turn to the Bible in times of trouble and find solace and guidance. The fact that pupils did not look at the Bible anywhere in the programme of study, or at how to use it as a resource, did not seem problematic to the teacher until it was pointed out. It was clear that there were a series of processes and modifying considerations at work in teachers planning of RE, which played out differently in different schools. However, the teachers in my Masters research were part of a larger context that framed the subject, which had its own peculiar history in terms of English education.

The broader context of RE in England

The problem of definition

All teachers find themselves in a context defined in part by previous generations. Freathy and Parker (2010) argue that there is a necessity for historical inquiry in educational research, and that research into RE suffers from a lack of this. In 2016, after hearing a presentation by Freathy and Parker (College of St George 2016) in my role as Chair of NASACRE, I made a decision to look at how the debates about RE had developed from the 1870 Education Act onwards. Historical research showed that RE has been a contested subject in non-denominational schools for almost 150 years. This can be seen in the arguments in parliament leading up to the 1870 Education Act with interventions such as Gladstone's on 16 June 1870 in relation to what became known as the Cowper-Temple clause (Section 14 of the Education Act, 1870):

‘[Gladstone] And I am bound to say, without in any way fettering my hon. and learned Friend, that that is a challenge which we should be totally unable to meet [referring to the idea that RE in state schools should not reflect a specific Christian denomination]. We do not know what, in the language of the law, "undenominational" and "sectarian" instruction mean. We know perfectly well that practical judgment and the spirit of Christianity, combined with common sense, may succeed, and does succeed in a vast number of cases—probably in the enormous majority of cases—in

averting the thorny paths of controversy in the work of communicating religious instruction to children.¹

This debate, and the 1870 Act that followed, defined the nature of RE in board and voluntary schools up until the present day as the Cowper-Temple clause was adopted by both the 1944 and 1988 Education Acts.

After 73 years, RE was still controversial as can be seen from the question posed by Mr Naylor MP to Rab Butler in a debate recorded in Hansard² for 20 May 1943:

‘Mr. Naylor asked the President of the Board of Education whether he is aware of the uneasiness in the teaching profession and parents generally concerning the proposals to be made for religious instruction in schools after the war ...’

His solution was that RE should be delivered at the end of the school day and delivered by clergymen, not teachers.

Butler responded by saying that the government had consulted widely on this issue and was content with the arrangements proposed.

The enduring nature of the Cowper-Temple clause was mirrored by the enduring nature of the mechanisms put in place for deciding what the RE curriculum should be in non-Aided schools, SACREs and Agreed Syllabuses Conferences, which were reformed by the 1988 Education Reform Act. Although the government believed that it had come to an agreed solution to the issue of the RE curriculum in non-Aided schools the subject continued to be a contested space within the curriculum, especially at secondary level (Copley 2008). In part this was as a result of the changing nature of British society from the 1950s onwards, which resulted in much debate amongst subject specialists, as can be seen in Cox (1983) and Hull (1981). These debates focussed on the content of RE in response to the forces of secularisation and

¹ [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1870-06-16/debates/5c2e0a2f-a67d-4499-be80-b395851a199a/Bp1a3360enmike/Cmhighlights/1943-05-29/debates/57b74d81-c609-0d5c-9a9c-e56742df52b/EducationBill\(ReligiousInstruction\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1870-06-16/debates/5c2e0a2f-a67d-4499-be80-b395851a199a/Bp1a3360enmike/Cmhighlights/1943-05-29/debates/57b74d81-c609-0d5c-9a9c-e56742df52b/EducationBill(ReligiousInstruction))

immigration. Copley (2008) notes the controversies about the RE curriculum during this period, especially the impact of scholars such as Ninian Smart and the impact of the controversies surrounding documents such as the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus of 1975. What was clear from looking historically at RE since 1870 was that it was a contested and regularly redefined space relative to the conditions that surrounded it. There had been attempts to define the content for RE at a national level as can be evidenced from the Model Syllabuses (SCAA 1994), Circular 1/94 (DES 1994) and the National Framework for RE (QCA 2004). However, these developments did not stop the debate about what the content of RE should be; as can be seen from the diversity of views and approaches to the RE curriculum by the new millennium that were collected by Grimmitt (2000), showing widely different approaches to the subject.

In part this was as a result of national documents being advisory, but increasingly it was less the content of RE that became questioned than the structures surrounding it, as I shall explore below. Conroy et al (2013) concluded that RE had ceased to have any coherent curriculum and had become a liminal subject. The overall problem with RE was that no one seemed to know what the curriculum should be, despite the existence of statutory documents which defined the subject. In part this helped to explain the findings in my Masters dissertation and acted as a context for this research.

The problem of structure

As noted above, whilst the content of RE was contentious it was the structures that surrounded RE that became a focus for critique. Professor Brian Gates, as Chair of the RE Council, in an address to the National Association of SACRE's in 2007³ reflected on the challenges facing SACREs in light of the REC 2006 National Strategy. The shifting nature of society, the difficulty of using terms such as religion and the variability of support for the bodies with responsibility for RE, were some of the themes that he focussed on. The presumption arose that the issue with RE was not the subject per se but the structures that supported it, as can be seen from Ofsted subject

³ https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/SACRE_the_politics_of_difference.pdf

inspection reports in 2007, 2010 and 2013. In 2013, Chater and Erricker argued that SACREs were doing damage to the subject, Chater being the last RE subject officer at QCDA and the then CEO of the Culham Institute, and Erricker being a long established lecturer in RE and the then RE Adviser for Hampshire County Council. In 2015 Clarke and Woodhead argued that SACREs and ASCs, especially the latter were at the root of the problem of RE in England and that there was a need for a national syllabus for RE and reformed SACREs. It was in this context that the Commission on Religious Education was established by the RE Council in 2016. The Commission's final report in 2018 called for a dismantling of the current arrangements for RE, and the development of a national syllabus which all schools that receive government funding would have to deliver to all pupils not withdrawn by their parents, irrespective of a school's religious status.

The question remained, however, whether the problem of RE had been diagnosed accurately. Was RE in a state of confusion because of societal change and the need to specify content or structural issues, or both?

The questions that arose from the historical enquiry

The historical enquiry identified one clear theme, that RE was a contested subject and that the changing nature of society and the historic structures that supported it were identified as the problem(s). Reflecting on this in light of my MA research, though, made me question whether this was true for teachers in the way that it had been presented, given that Conroy et al was the only empirical study in this area. Did teachers believe their curriculum offer was problematic? Did the structures actually feature in their thinking at all? There were indicators that they did not. Ofsted (1997; see also College of St George 2016) argued that RE was 'poor' at KS3 because teachers did not implement the locally agreed syllabus rather than the syllabuses themselves being the problem.

To be able to answer those questions it was necessary to consider how RE teachers constructed curriculum, what agency did they exercise? As Freathy and Parker (2010) argue for the importance of understanding how a curriculum subject is historically situated, Priestley (2011) and Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) argue that to

understand teachers' curriculum planning it is necessary to understand the nature of agency.

Agency and the teacher

I began to read Giddens' *The Constitution of Society* (1984) and his theory of structuration. In terms of agency he makes the point:

‘Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but their capability of doing those things in the first place (p9)’

For Giddens the act of agency is a conscious process, we act knowing that we do but that acting is bound within the parameters of possibility. Agency is not predetermined but exists within a socio-structural framework that is conditioned, but fluid. He argues that structure is about the social interactions in which power is situated, in relationships. To understand this, Giddens develops the concept of rules and resources:

‘One of the main propositions of structuration theory is that the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction (the duality of structure)’ (p19)

To that extent structuration forms the ‘conditions governing the continuity or transmutation of structures, and therefore the reproduction of social systems.’ (p25). According to Conroy (2013), RE teachers are part of overlapping social systems that relate to religion and education, something also noted by Adfal (2010), in his role as the Professor of Education and Religion at the Norwegian School of Theology. By applying Giddens to Conroy and Adfal it is possible to develop a construct that reveals the agency of the teacher as action bounded by two competing systems (religion and education), which exert influence on the teacher as s/he shapes the content of RE in their specific context.

Initially I thought that applying Giddens' theory to the issue of agency in relation to secondary RE planning would help shed light on the nature of RE teachers' planning

but I encountered a problem. My previous research had indicated that where teachers were making decisions about what to teach, whether over a period of time in a course or in a lesson, there were factors of which they were not aware. Giddens' concept of resources proved useful. He divides resources into two broad categories: authoritative and allocative. By drawing on these resources, teachers exercise power, the curriculum lead defining what others should teach (authoritative) and providing the materials to enable that to happen (allocative). The exercise of power, in terms of planning, is mediated by structures and these structures communicate significance, what Giddens refers to as signification. The teacher, as 'agent' draws upon their resources (authoritative and allocative) within a field of significance (the norms of the curriculum subject) to act in a way that is deemed legitimate. Giddens uses the term 'rules' at times to apply to signification and at other times to apply to legitimation. However, I identified a problem. What were the rules that would apply here? Were the rules internally or externally set? How would that apply to a teacher who was a trained professional with an appropriate academic background and one who was not? For Giddens, forms of institution are the products and producers of the structuration process. This however, does not adequately explain the context of the RE teacher at a micro sociological level, therefore I did not think that applying his theories would be useful.

As a result I looked for critiques of Giddens' work that might offer a solution and in this context I discovered the work of Margaret Archer. Archer (1995) objected to the way Giddens framed the concept of structuration and the inseparability of structure and agency, not least because it led to the collapse of structure into action, with the problem of not being able to identify what constituted structure. Archer offered more scope in being able to offer a framework in which it was possible to understand teacher agency, not least because she had already developed her theory by looking at school systems (Archer 1979). Much of what Archer has to offer is considered in subsequent chapters, including the methodology section. However, her writings on the reality of social structure as a set of ideas that framed socio-cultural interaction and agency proved useful. It enabled me to think about the ways that teachers might be influenced in their planning without the need to be conscious of the ideas at play, which they simply accept as axiomatic. What was unclear, until the research had been undertaken, was whether Archer's macro sociological approach could be easily

applied at the micro sociological level. It was not until later in the research process that I noted Archer's work appearing in writing on teacher agency (Priestley 2011; Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2015), which I will return to.

The question of agency, as constructed both by Giddens and Archer, required me to look more closely at the literature that focused on teachers as curriculum designers and implementers.

Curriculum history and teachers of RE

To understand better the area of curriculum planning in England, I researched that topic specifically. Using research databases, such as the British Education Index and JSTOR, I noted that curriculum planning ceased to be a topic of interest by the late 1980s. Lawton (1978) and Skilbeck (1984) were the most cited scholars, along with Goodson (see Norris 2008). It was not difficult to explain why, as the intervening period brought the National Curriculum in England and the process of planning, starting with first principles and working from there, was unnecessary. RE was in a different position. There had been authoritative curriculum documents since the requirement for locally agreed syllabuses in 1944 that applied to County and Controlled schools, but many of these syllabuses were simply ignored (Copley 2008). That agreed syllabuses were in many places defunct is indicated by the response of those involved in training RE teachers, such as Holley (1978) and Grimmit (1987), who both dealt with curriculum planning in RE without reference to Agreed Syllabuses.

Holley (1978) set out a philosophy of religious education on a broadly Augustinian model, which takes the reader through four stages in curriculum planning under the topic of aims. He identified four types of aim: General, Stage, Scheme and Lesson. 'General aims' are publically available in terms of expectations that one could reasonably have of the 'religiously educated' as a public category of meaning. 'Stage aims' are those proper to the school as a whole, in terms of expectations when a pupils leaves. 'Scheme aims' refer to programmes of study. 'Lesson aims' refers to what can be taught when realistically in terms of the demands of the Scheme, Stage

and General aims. There was a clear logic to his approach that build on developmental psychology. For Holley the religiously educated person recognises the primacy of spiritual insight, that is the recognition of spiritual interaction, the ability to be able to discriminate between the religious and the irreligious, and the ability to have scholarly insight into religion. Holley's philosophy is based in a particular anthropology that posits a religious dimension to being human.

Grimmitt (1987) brought together RE and Personal, Social and Moral education. Grimmitt's approach is also founded on a specific anthropology and educational psychology. He constructs RE as a 'process of self' that progresses in a sequence that is replicated at various stages in a pupil's education. He identified the sequence as: idea, adjustment, evaluation, identity, acceptance and illumination, which informed self-idea. This was a cyclical approach to curriculum with the process being revisited as the curriculum progressed. Working through a series of modules, Grimmitt built up a curriculum informed by religions and worldviews that enabled pupils to achieve a form of self-actualisation. He warned about the introduction of PSE in secondary schools, seeing its outcomes as unfavourable to RE. Whilst he was concerned about the encroaching of PSE into the space occupied traditionally by RE, Grimmitt also held firmly that 'religious educators are secular educators concerned with the value of studying religion and religions' (Copley 2008:122). In the process of producing modules of work, he sought to engage the teacher with the processes of planning the curriculum in RE.

Holley and Grimmitt's work became important for this research as a way of analysing what later publications had to say about curriculum in England. They represent two stages in the way that thinking about religious education had developed in the space of a decade, moving from a view of religious education being broadly religious to one that was broadly secular. The key to this change was less to do with the content base of the curriculum rather than the anthropological underpinnings presumed by these writers. The changing nature of what is believed to constitute what it is to be human, progressively changed the purpose of curriculum in RE. Not that that change was uniform as evidenced by the collection of papers assembled by Grimmitt in 2000, entitled *Pedagogies of Religious Education: Case Studies in the Research and Development of Good Pedagogic Practice in RE* and later by Gearon (2013; 2014).

Significantly, for this research, the general anthropological underpinnings of the secular curriculum were not widely discussed, although White (2009) was an exception to this. White argued that the modern secondary curriculum had its roots in a specific Calvinist tradition, especially as articulated through English Unitarianism. On the whole though, the anthropological question was not asked. This was not universally true of RE. The Birmingham (published 2007) and Hampshire (published 2004) agreed syllabuses stood out from those that followed the *National Framework for RE* (QCA 2004), as I noted in a report presented to the Cornwall Agreed Syllabus Conference on 21 January 2010 entitled *An analysis of five Agreed Syllabuses for the Cornwall Agreed Syllabus Conference 2009 – 2010*⁴. Both Birmingham and Hampshire syllabuses set out pedagogical approaches based on particular anthropological assumptions. The importance of anthropology as an indicator of teachers' decision making in RE was not at first apparent but later in the thesis I shall focus on this as key to the purpose and formation of the RE curriculum as articulated by the teachers in the study.

More broadly, there was a series of consequences as a result of the curriculum changes from 1988 onwards, which effectively meant that learning the skill of curriculum planning was no longer relevant because the government, through QCA, provided it. The QCA even produced a model scheme of work for RE with curriculum units that could be used by schools⁵. When the QCA did turn its gaze on curriculum planning and schools' curriculum freedom in 2008 it was for a specific purpose, improving pupils outcomes. *Disciplined Curriculum Innovation: Making a Difference to Learners* (QCA 2008:1) was designed to help schools meet the 'needs, interests and aspirations' of learners and any innovation had to be 'disciplined', 'based on evidence' and 'closely monitored'. This came in the context of anxiety about stagnation in results (Bangs, MacBeath and Galton 2011) and in the context of the constant drive to raise standards, much of which had been inspired by *The Learning Game, Arguments for an Education Revolution* (Barber 1997). Barber had argued that the new millennium would bring new challenges and the schools'

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<https://democracy.cornwall.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=666&MIId=2101&Ver=4>

⁵<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090608173720/http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes3/>

curriculum needed to reflect the needs of the future not the past. Teachers were the agents of change and agents of the state delivering its curriculum and innovating in a disciplined way when circumstances demanded. This is important for my research context in two ways, firstly, how teachers think about themselves as professionals; and, secondly how teachers are trained.

At this point I returned to Archer (1979) and her comments about England as a decentralised education system where teachers exercise professional control over the curriculum, not government. As a result I went back further to look at the issue of what it meant to be teacher in England from the 1960s onwards, as this enabled me to better understand Holley (1978) and the training I had received as an RE teacher in the early 1980s. My reading took me to the Robbins (1963) and James (1972) reports and the issue of professionalising the teachers.

The problem of professionalising teachers in England

The Robbins Report (1963) was a watershed in thinking about the professionalization of teachers in England and Wales. Chapter 9 looked specifically at colleges for the education and training of teachers. It noted that the arrangement for the education and training of teachers in England and Wales, and in Scotland were different but shared the same problems. The problematizing of teacher training by Robbins was a driver for change. The McNair Report of 1944 established University Institutes of Education but teacher-training colleges remained distinct from these. Robbins sought to bring them together, to be able to develop standardisation of teacher training at a time when the state itself, indirectly through local authorities, employed teachers. There was also a desire to see teaching as a degreed profession, recognising the gendered nature of higher education and the desire of many young women to have a professional qualification but not a degree.

The conclusion of the Robbins Report (1963:126) stated its aspiration for England and Wales as follows:

‘By the middle of the 1970s we expect that a substantial number of the students will be taking four-year courses leading both to a university degree and to a professional

qualification; and we hope that, long before that, the colleges in England and Wales will have been federated in University Schools of Education.’

Nine years on, the James Report (1972) (hereafter James), debated in Parliament (Hansard 15 June, 1972), put forward proposals for the future of teacher training, moving it progressively from a certified profession to a degreed profession, and setting national standards for the Certificate in Education in terms of teacher knowledge around their own specialism. James recommended three cycles in the professional development of teachers. Firstly, that higher education and training prior to initial teacher training should be at least three to four years, followed by two years of training to become a licenced teacher, followed by yet another year to become a registered teacher with a BA (Education). These first two cycles were to be followed by a third cycle where teachers would have a twelve week sabbatical every seven years of teaching. James had a vision of the teacher as a professional who could make educational decisions rooted in a thorough knowledge and understanding of their subject, child and adolescent development and the contexts in which their pupils were growing up. This was necessary as there was no National Curriculum at the time and only a minority of pupils would ever go on to sit public examinations, mostly those in Grammar and Technical schools (White 2011). This vision of teacher education and development was only partially realised in England and Wales.

From the late 1970s into the 1980s, the system of teacher education progressively changed. The three year Certificate in Education (Cert Ed.) was phased out and the option for Cert.Ed. students to transfer to B.Ed. degree at the end of their third year was ending during the same period. Teacher training colleges continued to offer B.Ed. (3 year) and B.Ed. (Hons.) (4 year) degrees. B.Ed. degrees had been first introduced in 1964 as a result of Robbins (1963) and there was considerable interest in their contribution to teaching as a profession, as can be seen in a HMI led study published in 1979 on the degree as a teaching qualification.⁶ By the early 2000s, though, this degree had been phased out and replaced by the BA (QTS); the latter degrees being primarily for those wishing to become Primary or SEN teachers, although some Secondary based degrees continued for a period. The most common way of qualifying

⁶ Developments in the BEd Degree Course HMI Series: Matters for Discussion No. 8
London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1979

as a teacher became to read an undergraduate degree and then to apply for a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE), which is still the predominant pattern. The place where such postgraduate qualifications could be obtained also started to change. Teacher Training colleges progressively closed, became the education departments of universities or became universities in their own right. Increasingly the government encouraged schools to become centres for teacher education, something that had been discussed extensively from the 1990s onwards (Robinson 2006).

The White Paper (2010) highlighted the importance of training teachers in light of international evidence (DfE 2010a), showing that teachers having a Master's degree in their subject area was a better predictor of their pupils' academic attainment than their (the pupils) prior performance. However, the model that emerged in the White Paper (2010) was one that in part existed already and it added little to the expectations for initial teacher education or post-qualification accreditation. Following the trajectory of the previous government, with the introduction of School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT), training was conceived of as something that schools should do and not universities. This led to the establishment of Teaching Schools.

Whilst Teaching Schools had to have been judged as outstanding by Ofsted and have a track record in delivering teacher training (DfE 2018) it did not follow that they must have had that record in a specific subject area that they were offering training for. Similarly, the government's commitment, from 2010 onwards, to teacher education showed some degree of ambivalence as schools that converted to become academies, or new schools under the Free School programme, did not have to employ teachers who had received any training at all. This was predicated on the belief that independent schools, who have no requirement to employ qualified teachers, did much better than maintained schools which did have to employ qualified teachers (DfE 2010 cf. 5.3). As a consequence of these changes, the *School Workforce in England: November 2015* (DfE/ONS 2015) reported that between 2014 and 2015 the percentage of qualified teachers decreased and the total number of teachers without QTS increased in the same period; although the number of serving unqualified teachers seeking QTS had risen in the same period. The White Paper (DfE 2010) also envisaged teachers working towards a Masters degree as part of their professional development, post qualification (Hampshire in Barnes 2018). In part, this appeared to

be compounded by efforts to clarify teacher standards. The *Teacher Standards* (DfE 2018a) does not require teachers to be able to plan a course of study; rather it focuses on lesson planning. Similarly, the *National Professional Qualification for Subject Leaders* (DfE 2017b) had little to say about curriculum planning.

The consequence of these developments had been to de-professionalise teaching. Wilkins (2011) noted that how teachers constructed their own professionalism had changed over time, from a period when teachers saw themselves as independent of the state, to being deliverers of the state's expectations. The state's dismantling of much of the infrastructure that supported teaching from 1988 onwards had in some ways brought the profession back to the pre-Robbins period, with the exception that there were national standards for teachers (DfE 2018a), which apply to maintained schools but not academies. From my reading I was increasingly convinced that there was policy confusion at the level of government concerning initial teacher training and professional development, which sent out confusing signals to schools and to teachers. This I pointed out in *The new religious education teacher and professional development* (Hampshire in Barnes 2018) noting that the government in England had expected specific standards for teachers over time, such as a Master's degree, but had no commitment to ensuring this happened and no infrastructure to achieve it. I contrasted this with the approaches taken by Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

To see if this were true for secondary RE teachers, I monitored two closed Facebook pages for RE teachers for six months from November 2017 and revisited them in November 2018. My starting point had been that a professionally secure RE teacher would not need to rely on others to inform them how to plan RE, although they may wish to learn about effective resources. My monitoring suggested that there was uncertainty about what should be planned for Key Stage 3. Questions about the appropriateness of content, or what should be planned for Year 8, were common. It was also clear that there were more fundamental questions, such as how to deliver key concepts such as the incarnation of Jesus to KS3 pupils. Often the response came in the form of purchasable resources from companies, so teachers themselves would be relieved of the responsibility for planning. My monitoring echoed Ofsted's findings in 1997 and subsequent subject monitoring reports (2007, 2010, 2013) and was further supported by NATRE in 2017 and the final CoRE (2018) report.

I concluded that the ambivalence of the government about the necessity to be trained and qualified as a teacher, the number of non-specialists being asked to deliver the subject and teachers' non-use of Agreed Syllabuses was causing curriculum confusion in Key Stage 3 RE.

Middle management in schools and curriculum responsibility

Curriculum design has been held to be the responsibility of middle management within a school. Secondary schools are organised along the lines of academic subjects (e.g. Mathematics) or subject families (e.g. Humanities). Since the introduction of the National Curriculum, as noted above, the role of middle managers as curriculum designers has changed. Busher (2006) exemplifies the issue. Reflecting on the impact of the National Curriculum he states:

'Teachers are responsible for working with students to help them learn what has been defined as knowledge by a school's curriculum.' (p106)

According to Busher, since 1988 the National Curriculum defined what had to be taught and what teachers were responsible for delivering. At the school level, middle managers ceased to be responsible for the curriculum per se, rather they became accountable for pupils access to that curriculum. Busher reflected on what it meant to build an accessible curriculum to meet the needs of all learners, and the partnerships that are needed to enable that to happen. Within each subject area there is a need to develop a culture of learning so that pupils will gain the most from their encounter with the subject. I recognised that this approach was underpinned by government publications that sought improve learning in the classroom, such as the box set *Pedagogy and Practice: Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools* (DfES 2004). This box set contained two DVDs and twenty booklets, which covered topics such as: structuring lessons and classroom management. The resource was designed for senior leaders, subject leaders and teachers. There was no sense that individual subjects might embody specific pedagogies or that certain pedagogies might be problematic in some subject areas (Grimmitt 2000).

The overarching concerns of Busher in his approach to educational leadership as a middle manager were reflected more widely in the literature. Barth (1990) explored how schools can improve pupil outcomes by changing the internal culture of the school. Brighouse and Woods (1999) explored leadership in effective schools, positing that everyone in the school is a leader – including pupils. Leadership was focussed on learning, not on what is to be learned and the specifics of the curriculum did not feature in their work, as it was a non-negotiable given. Similarly, Hattie (2009) and Hattie and Yates (2014) were less concerned with the specifics of curriculum than the ways that teachers can improve pupils' learning irrespective of the curriculum. In part, this is because Hattie and Yates use metadata on classroom effectiveness from across a wide variety of polities, where it would be difficult to analyse curriculum content.

Therefore, a further question arose, how do teachers create curriculum if no one expects them to do that and they have not been trained for that task? Two considerations arose when I looked at answering that question in relation to RE. Firstly, there was a clear history of secondary RE teachers not following the required curriculum (Ofsted 1997; Copley 2008; College of St George 2016). Secondly, the curriculum freedoms promoted by the Coalition Government (DfE 2010; 2010a) put teachers in a new position whereby they could create their own curriculum if they believed that it was better than the National Curriculum. The consequence of the White Paper was to open up a new debate about the nature and content of the curriculum as can be seen in Reiss and White (2013) and Waters (2013).

Summing up

The desire to better understand the issues around planning RE at KS3 led me to look at the history of RE in England and how it continued being a contested area of the schools curriculum. In that context, I looked at the literature that sought to identify where the problem was, either the changing nature of society (Cox 1983; Hull 1981) or structure (Clarke and Woodhead 2015; Chater and Erricker 2013; Castelli and Chater 2018). I moved on to looking at the issue of what it meant to be a teacher and curriculum leader by looking at the expectations on teachers and the skills base needed to meet professional standards (DfE 2018a) and the requirements for subject

leaders (DfE 2017b). All of this was situated within questions about the nature of teacher agency and how that could be understood when applied to curriculum planning, within the context of shifting and confusing messages about the curriculum from government (DfE 2010a).

Going back to Hull (1981) and Cox (1983) and their problematizing of RE due to societal change, I found that this was framed by two narratives, secularisation and migration. The solution was to produce a curriculum that would respond to those dual pressures. Reviewing Chater and Erricker (2013) I noted that the changing nature of society was a given and that their problematizing of RE was focussed on structural issues. This prompted me to go back to look at the larger issue identified by Archer, the issue of culture.

The issue of culture

Archer (1995) argued that cultural structure is ‘real’ in that it can be identified, talked about and used for cultural comparison, otherwise it becomes impossible to talk about culture without it being constantly collapsed into socio-cultural interaction, as discussed above in relation to Giddens. Taking Archer as a starting point I began to identify from the literature where cultural structure, the ideas that inform English culture, could be seen to have an impact on schools. Through reading Reay, especially in Reay, Crozier and James (2011), I became increasingly aware that one idea was dominating much of the literature about schools in England, neo-liberalism. This led me to Ball (2003; 2006; 2013).

Wilkins (2011) noted that Ball, along with others, had seen significant changes in teacher’s concepts and exercise of professionalism because of the changing nature of political culture that had an impact on schools, especially around performativity. This focussed on neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism is not easy to define, as Birch (2018) pointed out there is no single stable definition of this term. For the purposes of the research it was important to work towards a definition for myself in light of my reading. Therefore, I identified the following features of neo-liberalism as I saw it having impact on schools, following Ball. These features are:

- that the market is the best way to run not only an economy but also society and society's institutions
- for people to be able to make choices in the market they have to have access to information about what would constitute a good choice
- the market cannot be expected to self regulate and the role of government is to ensure that there is a level playing field, this it achieves through regulatory bodies.

Reay et al (2011) argued that neo-liberalism has an educative programme, which has two features:

- that people need to understand themselves as consumers
- that moral allegiances are to the self, family and close companions.

The question for me was, what does this mean for teachers as curriculum planners? In the initial stages of my thinking I applied the concept of a regulated market to schools, asking what that implied. The following emerged from the reading:

- if schools are in a market, understanding the quality of the 'product' is important for parents. To enable parents to make a choice the government has to ensure they have access to:
 - data about school performance
 - independent assessment of how good a school is
 - information about the curriculum that the school delivers
- if the market is to work, schools have to have freedom to act independently within the market, so they have to be able to
 - identify their unique selling point
 - set out a vision for pupils
 - communicate to parents their role
- as agents in the market schools have to be able to exercise freedom within an accountability framework.

The academies and Free School programme (DfE 2010; 2010a) promoted a vision of schools being free to design their own curricula; designed by inspirational teachers who would go on to inspire pupils and raise standards. This included a provision for parents, charities, faith and community groups to establish their own schools.

As a former teacher, inspector and adviser, I had noted the way that the Ofsted inspection frameworks and handbooks had shaped the management of schools. Therefore, I was also interested in the impact that managerialism had on secondary RE curriculum leads. It occurred to me at this stage that managerialism within schools would be less about curriculum and more about performativity and classroom management and this would be one possible line of enquiry, as discussed above.

Archer's (1979; 2013) approach depended to a great extent on being able to work backwards from looking at systems, to identifying what formed them in terms of cultural structure, to be able to compare and contrast them. As a result I looked more broadly at religious education or its equivalent in other countries, with a focus on the Council of Europe nations.

Looking more widely

In 2006 a series of books was published under the aegis of the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) under the title *Religious Diversity and Education in Europe* (REDCo). I started by looking at that series as it was based on research across the Council of Europe area.

I began with *Researching RE Teachers. RE Teachers as Researchers*, edited by Bakker and Heimbrock (2007) and noted that their agenda focussed on how RE teachers practiced in the classroom, and how practice could be improved on the basis of research. Within the book there was a steer on developing teacher professionalism. The collection of papers did not deal with how teachers planned their RE but how they executed it within the classroom. In many ways this reflected the issues of performativity of RE teachers and how that could be improved. I noted too that in the same year the Council of Europe also published *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education: A Reference Book* (Keast 2007), which set out different approaches that

could be taken in the classroom. Significantly religious education was subsumed into intercultural education, with its focus on social melioration. The growing anxiety in Europe about increasing diversity was also highlighted in *Teachers Responding to Religious Diversity in Europe* (van der Want, Bakker, ter Avest and Everington 2009).

From this reading it appeared that what constituted being an RE professional was different in different polities. I went on to read *Religious Education Research through a Community of Practice* (Ipgrave, Jackson and O'Grady 2009) and *Researching Religious Education as Social Practice* (Afdal 2010). I noted not only the difference of approach, the former rooted in the work of Jackson and Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit⁷, but also that within Afdal's Norwegian approach, the concept of the community of practice was culturally different. In part this was because within Norway there had been a historic debate nationally about the nature and purpose of RE in a largely Lutheran nation with increasing signs of diversity (Jackson et al 2007), whereas in England that debate occurred at only four points at government level, 1870, 1944, 1969 – 1970 and 1987 – 1988 (Copley 2008; Freathy and Parker 2015).

Reading Afdal (2010) introduced me to Engeström's activity theory, which became important in the research design in one specific aspect, as discussed in the Methodology chapter.

Summing up

It became clear that culture had an impact on curriculum in a way that I had not previously considered; this manifested itself in two ways. One was that cultural structure (Archer 1988; Archer et al 1998) could have an impact on the agency that teachers exercised without them having to acknowledge that impact. As cultural structure consists of a series of ideas that shape people's thoughts and actions it is also possible to distinguish between cultures. If this is possible, then a cross-cultural analysis of planning in RE is possible in terms of cultural structure and the way it is

⁷ <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/research/wreru/>

expressed at the socio-cultural level. I recognised that it was beyond the scope of this study to do such a comparative analysis but it was clear from the REDCo project that what it meant to be a religious education teacher, or equivalent, in different polities was different and that this could inform the analysis of the teachers in this study. What was not clear from this research was the freedom that teachers of RE in different polities had and how curriculum discipline was maintained in different nations.

Within the following Methodology chapter I look at the literature that specifically shaped the research design. However, it was clear after the research had been undertaken, that a number of themes arose that needed further investigation. This is dealt with later in the thesis as to better understand the data it was necessary to engage with different bodies of literature.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

Introduction

Understanding how teachers go about the act of planning involves developing a methodological approach to the task of research. In order to do this I take a systematic approach beginning with ‘Ontology’, ‘Epistemology’ and ‘Research Paradigm’. From there I move on to set out the theoretical underpinnings of my research model with reference to the work of Margaret Archer (1979; 2013) and Geir Afdal (2010).

Following the theoretical base of my research I then explain how I constructed a model relying on adapting existing approaches used in social research, based on those of Carmin and Balser (2002) and Fincham, Langer, Scourfield and Shiner (2012). I also explore how I developed the research instruments, the role of the pilot and how I made choices about sources of data to be investigated. The chapter will, also, explore how my research journey developed, the challenges faced and the decisions made in light of the theoretical framework that I adopted. I will also explore the issue of researcher bias and the challenges I faced in relation to my data subjects.

Ontology, epistemology and research paradigm

My research focuses on how five religious education teachers make curriculum decisions in Key Stage 3, with a specific focus on Year 8. The primary research question was:

How is the decision about what to teach in religious education at Year 8 made in five English secondary schools?

Subsidiary questions that inform the answers to the primary question were:

- *How is the planning of RE shaped by the contexts in which this takes place including the particular school context in which teachers find themselves?*
- *What impact, if any, does a teacher’s personal history have on their planning of RE?*

- *Does/how does the RE planned reflect teachers' attitudes and values as related to their understanding of the purpose(s) of RE?*
- *What role does negotiation and compromise play in teachers' planning of RE?*

Teachers make decisions every day: assessing classroom situations, and working out how to deliver curriculum to a class that might be more or less inclined to learn (Priestly, Biesta and Robinson 2015). Underpinning those decisions are decisions about the overall shape of the curriculum to be delivered to pupils. How we conceptualise the processes that formed those curriculum decisions is a matter of dispute, not just from the perspective of researchers but also amongst teachers themselves (Op.Cit). In relation to my own research, there are clear questions of ontology, epistemology and overall research paradigm.

One question that is worth considering at this point is: does ontology precede epistemology or epistemology ontology? Kant's rejection of ontology and metaphysics (Kant 1787 trans. Pluhar 1996) has led to a privileging of epistemology over ontology in the Western philosophical tradition (Patomäki and Wight 2000). It has become commonplace in social science, though, to discuss ontology before epistemology and then to state the research paradigm that is being used, leading to the choice of research methods (see: Hartas 2010 and Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018). The presumption is that ontology leads to epistemology and epistemology to methodology in light of a defined paradigm. For the purposes of this chapter I am following the commonplace practice of social science but with the caveat that I hold that the prioritisation of one over the others is somewhat arbitrary, and there is crossover in each of the following sections between these three areas.

Ontology

Ontology deals with the nature of being and, as a consequence, the nature of reality (Hartas 2010). However, there are different types of reality to be investigated, even in terms of one specific place and time (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2010), each with their own epistemological challenge (Angell and Demetis 2010).

In educational research it is useful to ask a series of questions:

- What is it?
- What is there to be known?
- What is the object of research?

As I am focussing on how teachers make curriculum decisions I take, as a basic assumption of my research, that teachers make real decisions about what they are going to teach. Teachers do this at different levels, long term, mid-term and short term. I am not taking as a basic assumption that they will teach what they have planned, or will teach it as envisaged when planned. I recognise from my own experience as a teacher that long term plans and midterm plans are not always realised in terms of specific classes being taught in secondary RE. Therefore, I am clear that the reality I am investigating is the long-term plan of secondary RE teachers in five schools. I hold that planning is real and purposive and, for the purpose of this research I shall treat it as a 'product' of the planning process that is publically available and negotiable.

However, there is a tension. It is clear that planning exists but there are questions about the processes of how that planning came to be. The reality of the process, the ontology of the common place within teaching, is something more difficult to deal with. Is the reality of the process something that is constructed by the teacher in the account of the process or is something created by the context in which the teacher is situated? In his introduction to Parsons (1991), Turner identifies the problem of whether the prime reality in relation to agency is the agent as social actor and therefore the substantial object of study, or whether the context in which they are situated – in terms of determinism and materialism – is the object of study. What is the nature of the reality to be studied? Discussions about Parsons' own position during his career on this issue initiated a body of responses (Op.Cit) that define the problem well. To know how teachers' account for the fact of their planning as a coherent explanatory narrative is not the same as accounting for the planning per se. However, such narratives must be taken seriously and may not be challenged without good cause based on evidence. It is not the place of the researcher to make a

judgement about the integrity of the data subject (teacher); which does not mean that the researcher must abandon the hermeneutic of suspicion (Angell and Demetis 2010).

In my research I take a view not dissimilar to that of Garfinkel (2002) in his assertion, with reference to ethnomethodology, that the task is to account for social facts. The underlying assumption of such an account is that there is an epistemological possibility of achieving that aim.

Epistemology

My broad epistemological position is that of critical realism. As Patomäki and Wight (2000) state:

Every theory of knowledge must also logically presuppose a theory of what the world is like (ontology) for knowledge (epistemology) to be possible. (223)

In line with Patomäki and Wight I hold a view of epistemological pluralism, in an attempt to move beyond the positivist and deconstructionist dichotomy, where constructivism comes somewhere between. To this extent I recognise that I draw on a form of qualified interpretivism, holding that we as humans are creators of what is to be known, but that there is more to be known than what we construct as knowledge. This takes seriously the narratives of teachers themselves as they produce explanatory narratives around their long term planning. This, though, is not enough to claim knowledge and I note Newman's (1874:6) assertion that:

... in a multitude of cases we infer truths, or apparent truths, before, and while, and after we assent to them.

The epistemological challenge of my research was set out in a paper I wrote as part of the Working Papers of the Warwick Centre for Education Studies Graduate Association (Lou, Wallis and Yang 2014). At that time, I did not engage either with ethnomethodology or complexity theory (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium and Silverman 2004) but looked towards two methodological approaches: repertoires of action research

(Carmin and Balser 2002; Fincham, Langer, Scourfield and Shiner 2011) and activity theory (Afdal 2010) as a way of constructing the sources of evidence that could then coalesce to be claimed as knowledge. My reasoning was that if there is epistemological pluralism then it must follow that there is a need for methodological pluralism.

What I recognised was that teachers' narratives alone are not necessarily reliable in terms of how a piece of planning came about, which is not to say that teachers purposely act to mislead, a common concern of decision research (Carroll and Johnson 1990). The narrative itself must be treated seriously but there is a need for epistemological relativism (Hartas 2010). Therefore other sources of knowledge need exploring, which may have their own rules regarding research, such as documentary sources.

It is possible to act without being aware of the pressures and influences that shape or limit that act. A teacher might not be aware that they are planning a piece of curriculum shaped by their overall view of the purpose of curriculum until they are asked to reflect upon it. This poses an epistemological problem. Does the intervention of the researcher create the knowledge that was not there in the first place or does the intervention draw out the unrealised? There danger is falling into what Frege's called psychologism in his critique of Husserl, where the latter was criticised for presuming intention from action or product that could not be verified (Gearon 2014).

In order to deal with this issue, the research design seeks different sources of knowledge that are particular to each teacher's situation. This enables me as the researcher to build a model of knowledge around convergence (Oancea 2005). The questions here are how can different sources of data, with their own epistemological challenges, be brought together to provide an explanatory narrative for each case study and how can these be used to form comparative case studies? These issues will be teased out during the rest of this chapter, but at this point I am working from the perspective of Newman (1874) that as humans we assemble facts which present themselves to us and we posit the relationships between them, including notions of causality, and then we make a claim to knowledge in the form of assent.

Research Paradigm

As indicated above, the paradigm that informs my research is that of critical realism as described by Hartas (2010). Recognising that critical realism is located within the post-positive tradition, it differs from realism (both empirical and linguistic) in that critical realists argue that ‘the world is composed not only of events, experiences and discourses but also underlying structures and power relationships, which exist regardless of experience and discourse.’ (Op.Cit: 40)

This paradigm enables me to clearly link my ontological underpinnings with my epistemological approach. It also recognises that knowledge and truth claims can be made which remain open to challenge and revision. Hartas (2010: 41), summarises the critical realist position as having three characteristics:

- Ontological realism
- Epistemological relativism
- Judgemental rationalism

Teachers are situated within a system of education that is itself socially sited (Archer 1979; Priestley et al 2015). Decisions teachers make are within a number of contexts. These contexts can be seen as a series of concentric circles such as national policy, curriculum requirements, accountability measures, local circumstances, individual school decisions and departmental constraints. To what extent teachers are able to make curriculum decisions and how to understand those decisions is disputed (Priestley et al 2015). These disputes focus around the issue of how agency is conceptualised and how that conceptualisation differs between disciplines. Some modes of thought see agency in such a way that there is pretence of freedom to act, such as Bourdieu’s habitus, or freedom with little constraint such as Giddens’ *structuration*; the tension between downwards conflation and upwards conflation (Archer 1988).

As noted in the Research Context (Chapter 2), when I began to think about teacher agency in relation to planning, in my Masters research I was drawn to Giddens’ 1984

work *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. However, applying Giddens' model to the ten teachers who I had interviewed, did not help to explain the decisions that they were making in terms of RE in their schools. In part this was because although they had the freedom to develop their own curricula, some felt unable to do as they wished. I then looked at the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977). They emphasise the importance of *habitus*, which is:

‘the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them’ (Wacquant 2005: 316, cited in Navarro 2006: 16)

This did not give enough scope to understand how teachers were making curriculum decisions in religious education. *Habitus* presumed a form of curriculum transmission based on previous experience which becomes axiomatic for the teacher and there was no evidence of any such replication model.

I then undertook further reading about conceptualising teacher agency and the work of Margaret Archer came to my attention, especially as it is an expression of critical realism.

Theoretical underpinnings

Archer

As curriculum planning is a result of teacher agency I was drawn to Archer's (1988; 2000; 2003) work on agency as a whole. I also found Archer's work referenced in the writings of others writing on agency (Patomäki and Wight 2000) and teacher agency (Priestley 2011; Priestley et al 2015). As noted, Archer's (1998) socio-morphogenetic approach supports the research paradigm that informs this research, ensuring that the broad theoretical underpinnings support the research paradigm and its working out in the methodological choices made.

A social realist, in her study *Social Origins of Educational Systems* (1979) Archer analyses four educational systems under two broader categories, centralised (France and Russia) and decentralised (Denmark and England). She argues that these systems came about as a result of the specific histories of the states as they emerged and as

education became a function of the state. In order to understand how these states organised education systems, Archer argues that it is important to understand the way hegemonic blocs⁸ work to exercise power. In different types of society these blocs act differently, accounting for the way a society functions. So within English education historically it is possible to identify the Church of England, the government of the day, Unions, business leaders as hegemonic blocs that work together or against each other to exercise control. To these can be added the Free Churches and the Roman Catholic Church in England. This is contrasted with the perspective of Giddens where context has little impact upon the actor and Bourdieu, along with Bernstein, where the context is so all pervasive that choice may simply be consigned to misrecognition (Archer 2013: xvi).

The approach taken by Archer, which becomes her overall theory, is that of socio-morphogenetics. Archer (1995) sets out a basic morphogenetic sequence of structural conditioning – social interaction – structural elaboration, as a theoretical mechanism for understanding current education systems and educational change, as educational systems are more or less dynamic, centralised less so and decentralised more so. Archer (1979) argues that the position of those who posit that society is the sum of individual decisions, the collective individualist approach, is not tenable on the basis of the evidence and does not afford a clear theoretical perspective for understanding educational systems and their development. Neither does an approach that focuses on a pattern of social replication based on the holding of cultural and economic power. Therefore, she develops a theoretical approach that addresses the weakness of both positions. The danger that Archer (1979) recognises is that macro-sociology can be accused of dualism, where there is a system in place that can be accounted for, but the actions of individuals within those systems cannot be accounted for using the same processes of analysis. Simply put, looking at the big picture does not explain what is happening in the little picture. Archer (Op.Cit p. 25) counters this by stating:

⁸ Archer does not directly use the term 'hegemonic bloc' but I have chosen to in order to indicate those bodies and organisations that can exercise influence but in order to be able to exercise power they have to work together by forming a critical mass. This approach comes from the work of Antonio Gramsci and for a summary of his contribution to this field see: [Anderson, Perry \(November – December 1976\). "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci". *New Left Review*. New Left Review. I \(100\): 5–78.](#)

‘The importance macro-sociologists attach to analysing limitations of man’s efforts to attain certain ends no more involves normative endorsement of ‘society over man’ than does a defence of voluntarism depend upon a denial of structure.’

Archer (1979) described England’s education system as decentralised at the time of her study, where there are a number of players at work which shape the system, mirroring the social fact that society is itself decentralised. In her foreword to the 2013 edition of *Social Origins of Educational Systems* she notes that the impact of the Education Reform Act 1988 had made a significant impact on centralising education, one which can be understood as being part of the centralising tendencies of the Thatcher government from 1979 onwards. By 2010 the narrative had changed with the White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010), which sought to give greater autonomy to schools and teachers, although the reality of the decentralising narrative is not without challenge (Ball 2013). Essentially, Archer offers me, as a researcher, two clear theoretical points of analysis. Firstly, that school systems, and therefore schools, are a reflection of the society within which they are situated; what she terms ‘cultural structure’. Secondly, those education systems are more or less dynamic because of the actors at play; this involves ‘socio-cultural interaction’ between those who have a stake in education at any one time.

My next question was how do I apply Archer’s theoretical model to my own research? It was at this point that I drew upon the work of Geir Afdal.

Geir Afdal

Archer gives us the macro-sociological framework for analysis but to apply that to the micro-sociological level I decided to draw upon Geir Afdal’s work *Researching Religious Education as Social Practice* (2010). As noted, above, Afdal is a Norwegian academic at the Norwegian School of Theology’s Department of Education and Religion. He has explored the complex way needed to understand what RE teachers do in their contexts (Afdal 2008) and the ways in which learning is structured in RE (Afdal 2015). Afdal (2010) sets out how to research religious education as a community of practice, a term that he intends to be ambiguous. That RE is described as ‘practice’ is not in doubt for Afdal, what is more problematic are

the concepts of theory and practice as applied to RE . Afdal proposes that the community of practice is the basis for researching what is happening in RE in schools and classrooms. Such a community can work with academics to generate knowledge in RE and how it should develop and be delivered. This I found useful, as I feel that I am a part of such a community of practice in a number of ways, which I explore below in terms of bias.

The community of practice model allows me as the researcher to look at the specific issues of religious educators. Religious Education is affected not only by the education system but also by the perception of the place of religion within the life of society and the life of pupils. Analysis of teachers' curriculum choices are inflected by their view of religion, their experience of it and how they envision the place of religion in the lives of their pupils (Conroy 2013). All of this has an impact on how teachers construct the purpose of RE within the context of a broad and balanced education (Gearon 2014).

Afdal (2010) draws upon Yrjö Engeström's activity theory, which focuses on the complex series of relationships involved in purposive action focussing around 'product'. I found this useful for exploring the relationships between the RE researcher, the RE teacher and the respective backgrounds in which they find themselves, where theorising about religious education is found in the complex of relations between researcher, researched and context. Whilst my thesis does not proceed on the basis of Engeström's activity theory, it does take an element of this as a point of departure for analysis and that is a 'mediating artefact', here a piece of planning that the teacher has done. The focus on planning moves the dialogue from abstract conversations about planning in general to concrete discussion about specific processes and intentions. It also allows the researcher to build outwards to the relationships that generated the product, some of which are structural and some of which are personal and interpersonal (Daniels et al 2010). Afdal acknowledges the importance of Skeie's (1998) insight that RE is at the intersection between the theory and practice of education and the theory and practice of religion, with the added complexity in England of having state funded schools with religious and non-religious backgrounds.

Avoiding theoretical confusion

Different methodologies presume different theoretical underpinnings (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011; Hammersley 2007; Hartas 2010; Hennink, Hutter and Bailey 2011; Seale 2004; and, Seale, Gobo, Gubrium and Silverman 2007). Although there are many crossing points, it is easy to confuse or conflate theoretical perspectives, which may lead to conclusions that are themselves confused and conflated.

The theoretical approach taken in this study is underpinned by Archer's theory of socio-morphogenetics. I recognise that the theoretical positions of others have shaped my own thinking about Archer's position, not least Engeström. The key question for me was how to develop a research methodology that would enable me to apply Archer at a micro-sociological level. Therefore the theoretical insights of Afdal based in Engeström's activity theory have had a specific impact on my research approach but did not lead me to employ activity theory per se.

From theoretical model to research design

To avoid confusion a number of steps were taken in developing the research design. The first step, when I had identified the research focus, was to look at the demands put on secondary RE teachers in their context. Like Archer (1979) I recognise that the system in England is decentralised but has increasingly centralising tendencies (Archer 2013). I recognise that some schools have specific demands put on them as they are maintained local authority schools with no religious foundation, some schools have a religious foundation and others are academies who have funding agreements with central government. The requirements on different schools are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: The requirements for Religious Education in different schools

Type of school	Requirements for RE
Maintained local authority school without a religious foundation	Locally Agreed Syllabus
Voluntary Controlled School	Locally Agreed Syllabus

Voluntary Aided School	The governing body in light of the foundation documents of the school
Converter Academy	The governing body of the school in light of its previous status
Academy	The governing body in light of the school's funding agreement
Free School	The governing body in light of the school's funding agreement

The development of academies and free schools that are now directly accountable to central government is part of a structural elaboration driven by specific political ideas that dominated the government at the time of their creation (Ball 2013). In the research I look at how cultural structure frames social interaction at the sociocultural level and how that plays out in curriculum planning, by looking at what teachers themselves see as the social and educational needs of pupils in the world that they imagine their pupils will live in.

I hold that to understand teachers' curriculum decisions it is necessary to understand the contexts in which specific teachers find themselves and the interplay of actors in the decisions that they make. These contexts are couched in the interplay between different hegemonic blocs, for example, government, Ofsted, school management and teachers. As an actor, the teacher may or may not be aware of the context in which they themselves are embedded. As a result, the context may not feature in the explanation of their planning. Using the prism provided by socio-morphogenetics, I hold that it is possible to explain teachers' decisions in terms that they themselves may not immediately recognise because there are underlying social structures of which they are not immediately aware (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson and Norrie 1998; Patomäki and Wight 2000).

Designing the research

The theoretical model and research paradigm imply that a complex approach was needed to collect data. A simple quantitative survey, asking teachers to identify how

they made curriculum decisions would not have allowed me to sufficiently situate them in their specific context, nor to explore with them their narratives about how the curriculum plan came about. A survey would be likely to create more questions than answers (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018; Hartas 2010) and would not enable me to ask the why and how questions needed to understand the product of teachers' situated actions (Yin 2014). What I wanted to take into account was the teacher's own narrative, the requirements placed upon the teacher and the school in which they were teaching with its specificity.

Drawing on the work of Everington (2012), which explored how teachers drew upon their personal experience as teachers in their teaching of RE, I decided to consider the place of teachers' personal and professional histories in their planning of RE. I looked at a number of ways of approaching the research that would enable me to gather data from teachers directly and place them in context. This led me to consider case study methodology (Skate 1995; Yin 2014). In order to be able to develop coherent case studies that could be compared and contrasted, I looked for existing models on which to base my approach. I became increasingly aware that it is possible to gather data from different sources around the subject and to put those together in a way that is coherent but leads to findings that hold little validity, confusing correlation with cause (Cohen, Manion and Cohen 2018; Flick 2018). I was concerned that collecting unrelated data and putting it together could lead to a seemingly coherent but misleading picture of why teachers planned their curriculum in a particular way, how that came about and what influences (conscious and otherwise) were involved. I created a research design, as set about below, and piloted it

The pilot

Through piloting a methodology I wanted two specific outcomes. Firstly, that I could see how different elements worked in practice. Was the methodology feasible and manageable? Did it allow me to make sense of what I saw before me in the planning? Secondly, I wanted the teachers themselves to give me critical and constructive feedback on how the process felt to them, what could be improved, what was unnecessary and whether they felt that the conclusions I came to made sense to them. The pilot included an investigation of the following:

- The RE medium/long term plan for Key Stage 3
- Interviews with teachers about how this came about
- A written piece where teachers would give an account of their own personal and professional history
- Interviews with teachers exploring their accounts of their personal stories
- An exploration of the teacher's own beliefs and values
- Each school's external and internal documents that relate to RE
- An interview with the member of the Senior Leadership Team about RE within the curriculum, including issues around resourcing and time allocation.

With the exception of the interview of the Senior Leadership Team all of these featured in the final study. I approached three teachers in schools that I had previously worked with, where the teachers were also members of a SACRE that I had supported as a professional officer and where teachers themselves had been involved in research. One school was a grammar school, one comprehensive – both non-denominational – and the third a voluntary aided comprehensive.

I also chose the schools on the basis that two teachers had a specialist background in Theology and Religious Studies and a PGCE in Religious Education, that one of these had active participation in a faith community and that the third had no academic background in Religious Education but had taught it for a number of years and was a subject leader for RE. All of the teachers had led RE continuing professional development (CPD) in their respective local authorities and more widely and were the primary curriculum designers in their schools.

Practical issues to be addressed in the pilot

Whilst I was intending to develop a series of case studies I did not develop full case studies for these schools. Rather I wanted to explore the questions that arose from the pilot. Four questions arose as I thought about the direction that the research proper should take.

The schools in the pilot, with the exception of the denominational school, did not have discrete RE in Year 7, it was not taught as a subject in its own right. All three schools were also starting GCSE in Year 9. So a question arose about at which planning should I look? I could look at the whole of Key Stage, or just at Year 8. I decided to choose Year 8, because it was the one year where teachers could make curriculum decisions. These decisions would not be bounded by the consideration of other subjects and not a part of a set examination syllabus. In the pilot I believed that Year 8 would be where teachers felt that they could make decisions to teach about what they believed was important for pupils in their schools.

This led to a reflection on the interview related to planning. What were the questions I wanted to ask? How would I be able to check the teacher's story about how their planning came about and why certain things were taught at specific times?

On the basis of my reading I decided that I would use semi-structured interviews in the pilot schools. I was not clear on which 'driving questions' would give me access to the best data. I decided to focus on different questions for the different schools to be able to assess the result. The first approach was to ask how the plan related to the requirements placed upon the school. The second approach focussed on what the teacher felt that pupils needed to know and understand from their RE. The third simply started with asking the teacher to explain how the curriculum plan came about. The first came across as too 'inspectoral', as if I was judging what was planned. The second led to a discussion about pupils and 'the problems' that the school faced. The third approach was the most useful as it allowed teachers to tell their curriculum story whilst I sought clarifications along the way. This gave me a basis to design the semi-structured interview for the full study around the curriculum.

The second question was how to identify the influences that were the most pertinent to the planning process. Preparing for the pilot I decided that it would be important to look at the curriculum requirements placed upon the school, how the school had situated RE in the curriculum, the school's Ofsted report, its performance in league tables, the school's demography – both in terms of intake and also in terms of the socio-economic context – and the amount of time and resourcing the department received. These appeared to form a consistent set of variables across the case studies.

The pilot study showed the usefulness of these data as a way of contrasting what teachers did in relation to what was required (whether they followed the required syllabus or not), how the curriculum as a whole became shaped by external accountability measures (public performance data and Ofsted), how teachers understood the needs of their pupils (demography) and how teachers planned against real time constraints (resourcing in terms of text books and time). What was less clear was the use of inward facing documents (such as policies) and outward facing documents (what the school put on its website). I found that the most useful were the outward facing documents because they allowed a point of comparison with practice that was in the public domain. In one school it was impossible to find internal documents even though the teacher believed they existed. As a result I decided that for the full study I would not take into account inward facing documents, as they would not necessarily aid the process of comparison.

The third question revolved around the teachers' personal stories and how they would be collected. For the pilot I asked teachers to write a short biographical piece about their personal lives and how that developed into their professional lives, which would be explored further during an initial interview. The pilot indicated that this would be difficult to pursue in the full study, as none of the teachers actually performed the task, even though a model was provided. This was based on work done by Caught, Jowett and Power (2005) in relation to teachers writing a contextual statement in support of their application to be a certified PSHE teacher. The model I developed asked teachers to look at three broad questions in terms of their personal and professional life:

- When did your interest in religion develop and why?
- When and why did you become interested in becoming a religious educator?
- Why do you continue as an RE teacher?

In the pilot I was clear to the teachers that I wanted to explore their accounts about how and why they became an RE teacher. Stating that there was no specific structure to the biography, although it might be worth approaching it chronologically. As none of the teachers performed the written task, I decided in the full study to make the

written piece an option before the interview took place, whilst accepting that it was unlikely that the teachers would complete it. I also looked at the terminology I was using and realised that I was confusing ‘biography’ and ‘life story’. I looked at Merrill and West (2009) and realised that I was not attempting to construct a biography of each teacher, or asking them for an autobiographical account of their lives that could be tested. To this extent I found the American Educational Research Association’s definition of biographical research useful as a way of confirming what I was and was not attempting as part of this research.⁹ As a result I decided that I would use the term ‘personal history’ as this reflected more accurately the methodology I was employing. Personal histories are constructed by the person in the context in which they find themselves, so are responsive and fluid. ‘Personal history’ is less formal than either biography or life history whilst being a valid source of data.

The fourth question related to teachers’ beliefs and values. I was unsure about how this should be approached. Should I ask them directly? Or, should it be gleaned from their personal and professional histories? Or should I ask the question when discussing the piece of planning? It emerged from the pilot that teachers referred to their own beliefs and values in the interviews about their personal stories and the curriculum plan, with different emphasis in each interview depending on the teacher. Therefore I decided not to ask a direct question about a teacher’s beliefs and values but to allow those issue to arise naturally in discussion.

What was decided on the basis of the pilot

On the basis of reflection a number of decisions were made:

1. That the focus on Year 8 RE would be the most appropriate way forward, as it was most likely to represent teachers ‘unadulterated’ planning in terms of subject integrity;
2. That it was appropriate to have a fuller understanding as possible of the school’s context, and that for the development of case studies these should be consistent variables;

⁹ <http://www.aera.net/SIG013/Research-Connections/Introduction-to-Biographical-Research>

3. That interview was the most appropriate way to collect data about the teachers' biographies, but that the term biography was inappropriate and 'personal story' should be used.
4. That the way of collecting data about teachers' beliefs and values should not be by direct questioning but allowed to come out across the interview schedule.
5. I also had a concern about leading teachers to give responses in the second interview based on the first interview: life history to curriculum plan. To avoid this I changed the order to look at curriculum first followed by the biographical interview.

Case study approach

I decided to adopt a case study approach before the pilot stage (Skate 1995), although I was unsure about how I would structure the case studies at that time. I selected a multiple case study approach enabling comparison, as set out by Yin (2014), using examples that Yin (2012) had worked through. Yin (2014:14) argues that case study approaches are useful in addressing 'how' and 'why' questions in relation to contemporary events over which the researcher 'has little or no control'.

Whilst acknowledging that there is no definition of what a case study is, he argues that each case study has two features. Firstly, it is an empirical enquiry that:

'investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within a real world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.' (2014:16)

and, secondly it has methodological characteristics that:

'cope with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.' (17)

To that extent it is a linear and iterative process.

I also drew on Skate (1995) in his approach to case studies, especially with regard to coding where he cautions that coding that is too complex is likely to yield data which is unlikely to be useful. Finally, I drew on the work of Carroll and Johnson (1990) on decision research, which is referenced by Yin (2014 p39). Yin argues that decision research can be a form of case study. The use of multiple case studies gave me the flexibility to either present case studies in parallel or to identify themes that the case studies could inform, or both. I made a decision early in the process to present stand-alone case studies, which followed a general structure that would allow analysis across the case study data as a whole.

I looked for research models that could be used to build case studies that enabled me to bring together the context of the teacher, what the teacher had done and what the teacher said about that. I felt that the work of Afdal, drawing on Engeström (1999), was not aimed specifically at the research I was undertaking as it focussed on teachers as researchers in their own contexts. I continued to believe that this model was underpinned by an important premise that what teachers produce and what they say about it are significant sources of data. When researching I came across the work of Fincham, Langer, Scourfield and Shiner (2011), which adopted and adapted a methodology from Carmin and Balser (2002) referred to by the latter as ‘repertoires of action research’. This approach allowed me to identify the sources of data that I could use to build multiple case studies and be able to compare the data as a whole and in part. In 2013, I proposed a methodological approach based on repertoires of action research (Luo, Wallis and Yang 2014), which I went on to use in the full study. Repertoires of action research was initially developed to understand why certain environmentalist groups acted in specific ways, and whether it would be possible to predict how a group would act based on their core values/beliefs, organisational history and the circumstances they found themselves in. Drawing upon Afdal (2010) I conceived the curriculum plan as the ‘action’ and then adapted Carmin and Balser to provide the context structure for each case study. Table 2, below, sets out the structure that I used on the basis of the work by Carmin and Balser and Afdal in light of the pilot.

Table 2: Carmin and Balser: structure of repertoires of action research

Carmin and Balser (2002)	Afdal (2010)	Categories of data in this research	Focus of the research
Action	Mediating artefact	Product of teacher(s)	Programme of Study
Organisational history		Teachers' personal histories	Interview about own personal history
Beliefs and values		Underpinning educational motivation	Data from the personal history and curriculum planning interviews
Cluster of circumstances		Data about the school, its pupils and the impact of internal and external forces on the teacher	Schools demographic context; curriculum requirements; school performance data; inspection

The pilot indicated that in the full study, it would be important to be able to analyse three areas, which corresponded with my development of repertoires of action research, and relate to the action, the curriculum plan. These I further subdivided for the full study:

History

1. Personal histories
2. Professional histories

Beliefs and Values

3. The aims and purposes of RE

Cluster of Circumstances

4. Scrutiny
5. Accountability

6. Resources

In the full study the six themes would be analysed either independently or in extension to the data from the case studies.

Selection of schools

Following the pilot, I decided that for the full study ten schools should participate in the study, five non-denominational and five denominational – the latter all being Church of England schools. Secondary schools were to be the focus of the research as it was in those schools that curriculum leads in RE would be likely to be teachers with a specialism in the subject, although that could not be presumed. The aim was for all the teachers to be self identified Christians. This would give ten case studies that could be used for comparison as noted above (Skate 1995; Yin 2014 and 2012). However, this was revised for a number of reasons.

I decided that it would be impractical to include ten schools in the time available, all of which would have to have all these characteristics and that could be researched in depth in the time available. Secondly, the amount of data that would be generated would be too overwhelming for one researcher to process. Therefore the approach was re-considered. The methodology could be applied to five schools as equally well as ten. I decided to broaden the research to include non-Church of England Schools if that was necessary, given that I may not be able to recruit two such schools. This may also allow a broader process of comparison. It also would allow me to look at teachers who might not have backgrounds in RE, would not be subject to inspection and might not have the support of the school in terms of its stated ethos. Whilst it was important to have a majority of schools in a similar geographical area, I felt that one school outside of this area might provide an interesting point of comparison.

The schools selected

In order to develop multiple case studies it was important to have schools that had similar and distinctive characteristics. Multiple case studies would need to be constructed around four tests: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. Therefore I wanted to have schools that shared similar characteristics

such as, coeducational, non-selective, state funded, delivered RE as a discrete subject at KS3 in an area where there were identifiable variables such as, specialist and non-specialist leads for RE, the demands of legislation as to what the nature of the RE curriculum should, maintained, academy, part of a Multi Academy Trust or not. This would enable me to use replication logic in the structure of each case study (Yin 2014).

Once the decision to focus on five schools was made, the original plan was to approach schools in the South West of England, corresponding to the area covered by the former Government Office South West. As a result of personal circumstances this became untenable. I decided to approach a senior RE advisor in Greater London, discussed the research focus with them, the characteristics and the types of schools I wished to research and asked for recommendations. She recommended six schools of which four responded positively. All were in South East London but not all were in the same local authority or diocese. I approached a fifth school as a result of doing some work with the head of RE previously, though not in a curriculum capacity. This school is based in the former Government Office South East region.

The four schools were recommended for a number of reasons. The teachers had all come in to contact with the RE adviser in their capacity as head of RE at the school, RE was known to be a discrete curriculum subject and there was a history of GCSE Religious Studies and, where there were 6th Forms, A Level Religious Studies. The characteristics of the teachers are set out in Table 3:

Table 3: Characteristics of the schools in the final study

	Designation	Status	Authority	RE provision	Religion or belief of teachers	Specialism of teacher
School 1	No religious foundation	Maintained – Ofsted requires improvement	Local Authority	Local Authority Agreed Syllabus	Roman Catholic	History – degree and PGCE
School	No religious	Converter	Board of	Funding	Muslim	Religious

2	foundation	Academy	Trustees	Agreement		Studies – degree and RE PGCE
School 3	No religious foundation	Converter Academy	Multi Academy Trust	Funding Agreement	Non-religious	Politics – degree – PGCE - Citizenship
School 4	Church of England	Maintained Aided School – Ofsted notice to improve	Governing Body/Local Authority	Governing Body and the local diocese	Anglican	Theology – degree and RE PGCE
School 5	Church of England	Converter Academy	Multi Academy Trust	Funding Agreement	Roman Catholic	Theology and Biblical Studies degree and qualified teacher status in RE

Looking at the schools together, there were points of comparison that allowed pattern matching and enabled me to address rival explanations (Yin 2014) as to the processes of curriculum planning in RE.

School number 2 in Table 3 had reintroduced RE as a discrete curriculum subject when the teacher arrived, although she was not appointed for that purpose, and she had been an RE teacher in schools previously, having trained as such.

I believed that the diversity of schools would enable the construction of five comparable case studies (Yin 2014) that would give sufficient data to be able to situate these schools within broader contexts for analysis. What I did not intend was that the findings from these comparisons could be more broadly generalised, arguing from the specific to the general as this would be a fallacy of composition (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018; Hartas 2010; Seale 2004). These were all schools that were identified as being good for the research in their own right, but they were not

seen to be representative of all secondary schools or types of secondary schools in England. Therefore these schools cannot be considered to be a valid sample to make generalisations about curriculum planning in RE across England. They nevertheless can give insight into both the usefulness of the methodological approach and whether this approach supports or challenges Archer's (1977; 1988; 1995; 2013) social realist approach, something I shall discuss later in the thesis.

Structure of the comparative case studies

In order to have comparative case studies it is necessary to collect the same or similar data from each data subject and to organise that in such a way as to be able to allow comparison to take place (Yin 2012).

I decided to follow a common pattern in the presentation of data:

- Introduction to the school
- The teacher, their personal and professional life up to joining the school
- The school – including publically available attainment data, Ofsted status, demography of the local authority
- Religious education in the school – the curriculum plan and discussion about that, a comparison with the curriculum expectation
- Discussion about the influences on the planning process
- Conclusion

This seemed the most logical way to present the data as a stand-alone case study, giving a coherent narrative, and as a way of being able to compare case studies for analysis. This approach also supported the research paradigm that I had chosen, recognising that there is epistemological pluralism and a need for methodological pluralism (Patomäki and Wight 2000), and where different sources of data can be brought together to generate knowledge (Oancea 2005).

Data Collection

Schools' contextual and attainment data

Much of the data available about schools can be accessed through their website, with one notable exception. Schools are required to publish their curriculum plans and put them on their websites for parents and others to see. They also have to publish policies as required by government on their websites. Schools also either put a link to their latest Ofsted report or a copy of the report for download. The one exception is a link to the Department for Education's website that sets out the schools' attainment, performance and staffing data; therefore it was necessary to access that data separately. Where a school is an academy there will also be access to its funding agreement, which sets out what is required for religious education in the school.

Curriculum data

Schools are required to publish their curriculum plans and put them on their websites for parents and others to see. Before visiting the school, the website was looked at for curriculum information relating to RE, some of which was downloadable. Absence of information was also identified. The latter issue was followed up during the first interview.

Local authority curriculum data for RE

Each school is in a local authority area and each local authority must have a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) and an Agreed Syllabus, which sets out the statutory requirement for RE in maintained non-Aided schools in the authority's area. Agreed Syllabuses are publically available and local authorities publish them on their websites. I downloaded the locally agreed syllabus for KS3 that was specific to each school's local authority.

Local authority and national demographic data

Local authorities websites were also sources of demographic data for the area as a whole and for each school in particular. This was checked against the national Data Shine website that gives ward level data across a number metrics, such as religious affiliation, race and ethnicity and employment statistics.

Interviews with teachers

As noted above there were at least two interviews with teachers, each at least one hour long. These were semi-structured interviews (Hartas 2010) with at least one

focussed on the Year 8 programme of study and one on the life and professional history of the teacher. Across both of these types of interview, the teacher's own values and the purpose of RE were discussed. No corroboration for the biographical data was required, as I felt this unnecessary and intrusive. Therefore what teachers said was taken at face value. The basic questions around which conversations took place are presented in Appendix 1 and 2, along with an example of interview transcript at Appendix 5.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Notes were taken during each interview and a reflection on the interview was written immediately after each interview without going back to the recording.

Data analysis

Data was collected in the following ways:

- accessing DataShine locality data and local council data about the area each school was situated in
- accessing the school's website and downloading relevant curriculum documentation
- accessing data about the school from government websites, DfE and Ofsted
- interviewing teachers by use of digital recorder
- asking teachers for relevant hard copy documents that I could take away
- asking teachers to email me any relevant documentation that could help explain their curriculum decisions
- accessing local authority and diocesan websites to look at the curriculum requirements placed on the school for RE, or adopted by the school.

Data was for each individual case study and the data was organised to form the structure of each case study to allow comparison. Each school was broadly geographically and demographically situated. This included data about religious affiliation in each school's postcode area as well as ethnicity, educational and employment data. Statements the school made about itself, such as its aims and

purposes and its ethos were collated, along with what the school put on its website about RE as part of the curriculum offer of the school. This curriculum offer was then compared to the requirements of the local authority or diocesan board. Where there were similarities or differences these were noted as something that might be pursued in discussion.

Teachers' interview data was coded initially using predetermined codes and then re-examined so that additional codes could be created (Seale et al 2007; Skate 1995). This iterative process involved going back over earlier readings of transcripts and adding codes where necessary. Codes were colour-coded for the purpose of highlighting the extent to which certain themes re-emerged during the interview or which dominated the interview. The coding for both interviews can be found at Appendix 3 and 4. A significance scale was also used, as it is a non sequitur to hold that something is necessarily of less significance because it was talked about less (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018). In each case study, themes were identified that were individual to the school and the teacher.

The statements the school had made about itself, as noted above, were checked against the data from the teachers' interviews to identify where they were mutually supportive or contradictory.

Once the data had been presented, a discussion was constructed as the first level of analysis. This discussion also put the school in the broader context of the research about RE nationally and situated the case study in the context of current debates about RE, given that during the period when the research took place, there was a national debate about the surrounding structures and the place of RE in the schools' curriculum.

The data from each case study was then used as the basis for a second level of analysis, identifying significant themes for all the teachers' involved, through comparing and contrasting data from the case studies, noting similarities and differences. From this analysis findings were proposed. This led to identifying internal and external factors that could be identified as having an impact on

curriculum planning. From this, five themes were explored in greater depth, with a further theme looked at in terms of the literature.

The data findings were used as a basis for re-examining the theoretical base, that was the prism through which the case studies were being analysed. This process led to questions about the social processes that underlie the dynamic nature of decentralised education systems (Archer 1979 and 2013) and how those play within broader cultural processes. I wanted to focus on the way that religion is perceived and how that is reflected back into Religious Education specifically, noting the interplay of hegemonic blocs at a local level as well as national level as they shape the thinking of teachers planning RE (Gearon 2014).

In Chapter 7 I apply Archer's morphogenetic sequence to the evidence and in Chapter 8 look at how cultural structure has an impact on teachers' planning in three contexts, which I have termed micro, meso and macro to identify the broader cultural ideas that had an impact on these teachers from the evidence gathered. To do this it was important to situate the teachers within the broader discussions about the place of religion within society, the nature of the secular space and the place of a school within that space, whether it has a religious foundation or not (Afdal 2010; Commission on RE 2018).

It was also necessary to ask a question not anticipated either by Archer or Afdal that concerns teachers who work in a polity in which they were not socialised, educated or became qualified. How does macro-sociology account for globalisation and global movement of teachers? Therefore, part of the methodological approach was to identify anomalies to question the theoretical presumptions of the research.

Researcher influence and bias

The issues identified

From the beginning of the research process I was concerned about how I as a researcher could have an influence on the data. As a local authority, regional and national figure in the world of Religious Education I had been involved in curriculum

design in RE, most notably in the writing of agreed syllabuses for Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly and Torbay. I was a consultant at QCA and QCDA between 1999 and 2010 and I had written and translated curriculum materials for RE Online. I had also been an examiner for Religious Studies GCSE until the mid-2000s. I had written about RE in the curriculum and issues relating to RE (in Barnes 2018; Hampshire 2016; Hampshire 2014; Hampshire 2013; Hampshire 2012; Hampshire 2007; Hampshire 2006) and during the research period had been Vice-Chair and then Chair of NASACRE¹⁰. I had advised or inspected many of the schools in the South West. I had spoken at regional RE teacher conferences, NASACRE and South West SACRE conferences. Therefore, it would be reasonable to conclude that this publicly available data could have an impact on the teachers as data subjects, especially in the South West.

To develop my own thinking about researcher bias I read Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) on subjectivity and the need for reflexivity. On the basis of this reading I had two primary concerns. Firstly, my opinions about RE were widely known, especially on local determination and agreed syllabuses. This could have an impact on the questions I would ask about curriculum design and the role of locally agreed syllabuses. This might put pressure on teachers to respond in a way that they thought I would be expecting to hear.

Secondly, it was known that I had been an inspector and teachers being interviewed might feel that they were being inspected, looking for affirmation about what they were doing. This did happen in one school where I was asked by the head teacher to offer an evaluation of the RE curriculum in the school. Along with this I was also concerned that I would ask questions that had been primarily shaped by the Ofsted inspection process based on a series of internalised judgements for the Schools' Inspection Framework in its various iterations from 1997 onwards.

Along with these two concerns I had to acknowledge my own feelings about RE planning as a former RE teacher. I thought of myself as predominantly on the inside of RE as a social practice and therefore having an emic perspective. However, I

¹⁰ NASACRE (National Association of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education) is the national body that supports 147 SACREs in England.

realised that my perspective could be seen as predominantly etic as I had spent more time out of school and classrooms than within. I also had to acknowledge that my own teacher training took place at a time when it took generally three years to train and a further year to qualify. As part of my own initial teacher training I was tutored by Raymond Holley who wrote *Religious Education and Religious Understanding. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religious Education* (1978) who was pivotal to my understanding of planning in RE. Therefore, when looking at the planning of others I brought with me certain expectations of what planning in RE should achieve and the processes that planning involved. This was likely to shape comments that I made about the planning of others.

However, I was concerned that I would shape any data to my view of the world in a way that would obscure both the data and the findings, as the data would be presented and the outcomes based on that presentation. This could be unconsciously achieved not simply by what was presented and how, but also what was discounted from the evidence, given that the data for each school was considerable.

Finally I was concerned that once one case study had been undertaken this would set a pattern that inappropriately presented the data of the other case studies so that an overall pattern could be seen on the basis of the manipulation of the data as presented. This would lead to findings that were methodologically and epistemologically doubtful.

Accounting for bias

When exploring non-experimental case studies Rutterford (in Seale 2012) states that the way that bias is eliminated in case study research is through both the design and conduct of the research. In the design of the case studies it was important to ensure that there was a range of data: primary and secondary sources, opportunities to check the data; triangulation of data – especially identifying anomalies; that data was analysed and interpreted on its own terms; and, that the written case studies were comparable for analysis (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011; Yin 2014).

I also followed Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) and I kept a journal of each case study where I could go back and ask myself questions about how I felt about the process, how teachers had reacted to me and issues where I felt they were shaping their responses according to my assumed expectations. I wanted to be clear that they knew something about who I was, in terms of gaining meaningful access to data sources, but were also clear about what the research was and what it was not. I set this out in a letter to each school (Appendix 6). I ensured that the schools in the full study were those in which I had had no involvement as an adviser or inspector. In the pilot I knew the teachers well and this was an advantage, as they could give me honest feedback on the process, which then could inform the research. In both the pilot and full study I was also clear from the beginning that I would not be making value judgements about the curriculum offer to the school as I was focussing on the process of curriculum decision-making. Likewise I was not evaluating the decision making process but seeking to understand that process and present it as part of my data. When asked to give value judgements I refrained.

Schools were informed of the general research methodology and process and asked whether they felt they could be part of the research. Two schools did ask something in return and as a result I gave seminars to 6th Form pupils on selected topics.

I was also aware that there is a tradition within RE, championed by Ninian Smart (1968) from the perspective of phenomenology, of the belief in need for and therefore the possibility of epoché (what he terms ‘neutralism’ pp. 90 – 91; see also Barnes 2000), the suspension of judgement and the belief that it is possible to leave value judgements behind in the research and accounting process – something held strongly by one teacher in the study. I am firmly of the opinion that epoché cannot be achieved and that recognising one’s own position in relation to the overall subject is important.

In terms of the interviews their semi-structured nature meant that the initial questions were open, with supplementary questions seeking clarification or further elaboration. In this way I tried not to impose my agenda on the teachers being interviewed. The pilot helped in this regard, identifying moments when further questioning could become leading. In order to have an academic perspective on each case study, when the first anonymised draft was complete I shared it with an experienced RE adviser

who holds a different position to me and I also shared it with my supervisor. This proved to be useful as I was asked questions about the case studies that I had not previously considered, especially in terms of judgements but not exclusively. This enabled me to enter into a professional conversation about each case study and the presentation and analysis of data that made me question some of the assumptions I had made.

Finally, one way to minimise or recognise bias is methodological integrity within the theoretical construct being applied (Yin 2014). Therefore, once the methodology had been established I ensured that I was the guardian of the process as opposed to being an actor in the field. This cannot eliminate all bias but it can provide a framework for self-evaluation for the researcher.

Personal history research and decision research

Using biographical research in social research is fraught difficulties not least in terms of validity and ethics (Merrill and West 2009), whether that is constructed as autobiography or life history (Harrison 2008); similar issues apply to decision research (Carroll and Johnson 1990). There was no attempt to check personal or professional biographical facts. Rather it was the teachers telling their stories that helped me to understand the curriculum decisions made (Op.Cit), not simply in terms of the construction of the curriculum but also why the curriculum remained as it did in the view of the teacher. This did not exclude the criticisms teachers had of their own curriculum and changes that they saw were necessary, as this shed light on the current curriculum and the processes involved (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2015).

Research ethics

Schools were informed that I would be complying with BERA's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (3rd Edition) and the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice (2002; 2017). As a result each case study was anonymised, with place names changed and teacher's names also changed. When drawing upon biographical data all identifiers such as place of birth, school and university were made anonymous, as was the professional history of the teacher. The one area of difficulty here was the quotes from schools' websites that could be

detected on an advanced Internet search. Given that this research is presented at least two years after these sites were accessed for data, the indication is that those sites have changed sufficiently to make this a difficult process. It will always be the case though, that anonymity is difficult to achieve and therefore there will be a time bar set to accessing the case studies.

The anonymisation of the case studies also applied to the RE Adviser that read the initial drafts to make comments on.

Iphofen (2011) produces an ethical review checklist as part of his publication on ethical decision-making in social research, which was used in the research process at various points.

Conclusion

The methodological approach for this research was always situated within a theoretical paradigm of social realism, as espoused by Archer (1979): that educational systems, and the parts thereof, can be accounted for on the basis of understanding the society in which they are situated. To apply this to Religious Education in schools, the insights of Afdal (2010) were employed, supported by Fincham, Langer, Scourfield and Shiner (2011), the latter giving a basic structure to the research design. The danger throughout is to engage in the fallacy of illicit transference. Hence, no claims are made about the general from the particular in the research methodology, rather it is seeing whether the particular can be better understood from the position of the general theory espoused in light of the data collected and analysed.

In the next two chapters I present the case studies. Chapter 4 presents three case studies of the schools without a religious foundation. Chapter 5 presents two case studies of schools with a religious foundation, in this research both Church of England schools. Yin (2014) notes multiple case studies need to be constructed around four tests: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. The case studies are designed to meet those tests and are grouped together so that schools that share similar characteristic are presented for ease of analysis before moving onto analysing the five case studies as a whole, allowing more effective pattern matching (Yin 2012).

Chapter 4: Case Studies Schools without a religious foundation

In this chapter I present the three case studies for the non-denominational schools in this study. The case studies follow a set pattern. There is an introduction to each school and the teacher who is the focus of the individual case studies. This is followed by the teacher's personal history up to the time that they started teaching at the school, including their early life, schooling, university education and post-graduate teacher training. I then go on to set out the school in its context, both in terms of the schools attainment data and inspection reports, and demographic data. This situates the next section which looks specifically at the RE offer in Year 8 and KS3 as a whole. I draw the findings together in a discussion and end each case study with a conclusion, where I have presented the findings in the form of a diagram.

The schools are presented in the alphabetic order of their anonymised names.

Dale High Academy

Introduction

The school is a moderately large secondary school with a 6th Form in the East Midlands. It converted to academy status after the reforms introduced in 2010 by the Coalition Government (DfE 2010 and 2010a). As such the school has a funding agreement with the Department for Education, which sets out its curriculum responsibilities for religious education.

The teacher is the curriculum lead for the school within the Humanities department. Most of the teacher's time commitment is teaching A Level but she has responsibility for curriculum planning for a team of teachers delivering RE at KS3. This is the teacher's third school and when initially employed at the school it was not to teach or lead RE, a role that developed as a result of the teacher herself. At the time of the research Juwayriyah was doing an MA in religious education at a Russell Group University part-time as part of her professional development. The teacher is a member of the local authority's SACRE.

Juwayriyah

Juwayriyah is a Bangladeshi heritage teacher with a Muslim background. Initially attending the madrassa based at a local mosque, it was decided that her Islamic education should carry on at home. She has powerful memories about learning text at the madrassa and at home. The love of text and the impact of text carries on throughout her life to this point and she describes text as ‘really moving’ and ‘very very spiritual, it’s very powerful’.

Juwayriyah has no clear memory of RE at primary school and her earliest memories of secondary RE were vague. She did, though, remember the text books the schools used.

‘I enjoyed learning about some of the text and some of the books and in fact we were allowed back then to have text books at home so I used to quite often go home and open up my RE text books and work through, RE and geography, they were two of my favourites.’

There were two significant characters that emerged in her secondary education, including 6th Form. The first was her secondary teacher:

‘But RE wasn’t really that significant until Mr Morecambe came along.’

‘...the memories I have of RE are mainly linked to the lessons I had with Mr Morecambe.’

Whilst a committed Christian of Jamaican heritage, later becoming a pastor in a Baptist church, he encouraged questioning and was open to challenge, Juwayriyah relates:

‘... we loved challenging our teacher and then asking him questions and fascinated about the fact that there is this Christian Baptist teacher who knows so much about our faith, this is so cool.’

The second influence was Juwayriyah's 6th Form A Level RS teacher, Leah De'ath. One reform that Ms De'ath introduced was a change to the A Level specification, introducing Islam along with Philosophy and Ethics. This proved popular due to the number of students from a Muslim background. In many ways, though, it was her new teacher's teaching style that inspired her and once Juwayriyah's degree was done she went back to the same 6th Form college to train as a teacher and to teach there.

In tribute to both teachers Juwayriyah said:

'I know that I'm teaching like my teachers. The way I teach is the way Leah taught us, the way I was taught by Leonard Morecambe, they were both, and I always say this to my students, my role models are both ones Jamaican Baptist Christian male the other Catholic female white, you know your role models are not necessarily those who are from the same culture as you. But that ... I ... they have absolutely had an impact on the way that I teach, the way I approach my teaching, the way I plan my teaching.'

Juwayriyah added that it was as a result of Ms De'ath that she went to university and this had not occurred to her before.

This narrative reflects teaching style and individual lessons not planning in KS3. There is an echo, though, of the textbooks that were used at her secondary school. When questioned as to what the books were Juwayriyah recalled:

'I remember Michael Keene's books and I remember the text in there and I always felt that I learnt a lot from a lot of the information in there.'

Remembering elicited and emotional response, here seen by the use of the word 'love':

'And there were some really basics books that had lots of images and tasks, a little bit of information, pictures and I love those little boxes that you could work through the tasks, I used to love doing that and I'd love and what I liked about taking things home

was that I could work at my speed, ‘cos in the classroom you have to go at the speed of the class.’

New Steps in Religious Education by Michael Keene was a widely used resource in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This series covered six major world religions according to themed sections. This allowed for comparison of each religion with another whilst also seeking to build-up a relatively comprehensive overview of each religion over three years. It also presented religions as having relationships based on Smart’s (1969) phenomenological taxonomy and a concept of the history and progression of religions in a specific mode with clear familial similarities, such as Abrahamic and Dharmic.

After 6th Form Juwayriyah went on to study Religious Studies at an elite metropolitan university, where she also did her PGCE.

When asked about the influence of her degree at Bishop Otter’s College Metropolitan on her teaching of RE she stated:

‘... I think my degree has definitely had an influence the way I think about teaching RE, definitely.’

This was because it focussed less on traditional Theology but on a broader spectrum of religious traditions, which she felt gave her an advantage over others whose experience was narrower.

The impact of the degree on planning religious education is hedged with personal experience both as a pupil and as a teacher in the early stages of her career development.

‘I think my interest in world religions and making sure we’re teaching other world religions equally, that’s probably what it’s given me because my early experiences of teaching and in both my previous schools they were very reluctant to teach outside of Christianity.’

and her perception is that the focus on Christianity has done it no good:

‘I think the reason why I can’t remember very much of my year 7-9 RE is because it was predominately Christian and we touched on some of the world religions and sometimes I feel that does Christianity a bit of a disservice because the children feel they are exposed ... they’ve got friends from different religions ... why are we not learning about this?’

Juwayriyah’s experience of her PGCE further affirmed her love for the subject and her desire to teach it, although the narrative again focuses on inspirational individuals:

‘[I had] two very very good course coordinators, Sally-Ann and Seraphina, I remember them very well. They were quite obviously good RE teachers in the past and very inspiring.’

The PGCE also gave Juwayriyah the opportunity to broaden her experience of religious traditions in the UK, cementing her view that teaching about breadth was important.

The original plan of going back to her 6th Form college to focus on A Level teaching worked at first but her second placement changed that trajectory. The head of department in that school was an alumnus of Otter’s College Metropolitan and as it wasn’t far to travel from her home it made sense to go there. Again the head of department was seen as key:

‘Patrick was absolutely brilliant. I walked into the school I was the only Asian woman in the school ... and I wasn’t used to being in that environment and I thought oh no, and this was just after 9/11, so there was a lot of tension.’

An incident that made an important contribution to the shift in career path was when Patrick introduced Juwayriyah to pupils:

‘One of the things that Patrick wanted was he said we need people like you in a school like this, because these children don’t see ... they don’t know any Muslims

and the first time he introduced me was quite funny actually. He said here we have a ‘real life Islam’, and he was joking because he was saying and that is not how you talk about a Muslim person, you say a Muslim.’

Even though Juwayriyah had a job lined up at her former 6th Form college she decided to stay at her second placement school as a job came up and the head of department put pressure on her, along with others, to stay. This caused her some anxiety but with the support of her PGCE tutors she decided to stay.

The PGCE did give her practical skills in terms of planning RE but there was no memory of planning for more than a unit – and this was done collaboratively. Prompted by her PGCE tutor she was asked to get the school’s schemes of work:

‘I turned up and I was asked by my ... one of our tasks on our PGCE course was to ask for schemes of work when we get in there. I turned up and I said to my colleagues: so schemes of work, what are they, I need to start developing some, and they laughed at me ... my colleagues said ‘ha ha ha’ is that what they call them these days!’

In the school there was no sense that successful RE has anything to do with planning in any positive sense. There was also no sense of what RE was trying to achieve in this school from Juwayriyah’s narrative. Rather, good RE comes down to good, engaging and dynamic teachers.

She moved to her second appointment to a school where she had freedom to develop RE but when a new head of department was appointed she decided to move. Juwayriyah reports:

‘... we had a change of head of department in that second school and it just became even more rigid because he had his lessons and everything was set and he changed the whole curriculum again according to what he wanted to have. I was just expected to follow and my experience, my knowledge, none of that mattered.’

It was at this point Juwayriyah decided to leave the school she was teaching in and took up a post of Humanities teacher in her current school.

The school

The school is situated in a larger town in the East Midlands, which saw rapid expansion in the 1970s and 1980s. The overall population at the last census for the local authority was 230,000 and the area in which the school is situated 8,100. The Office for National Statistics designated the town as ‘urban’ and Tables 4 - 7 are drawn from the ONS Census 2011 data set.

The overall picture of the ward where the school is situated is one of a predominantly White area with a higher than average Christian population. Educationally the post-16 population has lower attainment than the local authority as a whole, with significantly lower levels of attainment at Higher Education. The population works predominantly in occupations associated with lower income with a significant number in manual labour.

Table 4: Ethnicity in the ward where the school is situated

Ethnicity	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
White (all categories)	80	82
Mixed (all categories)	3	3
Asian (Indian sub-continent)	6	4
Asian (Chinese and other)	4	2
Black (all categories)	7	6
Other (all categories)	0.7	0.3

Table 5: Religion in the ward where the schools is situated

Religion	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
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Christian	53	58
Buddhist	0.5	0.5
Hindu	3	1
Jewish	0.2	0.1
Muslim	5	3
Sikh	0.6	0.2
Other religion	0.5	0.4
No religion	31	29
Not stated	7	6

Table 6: Level of education for those 16 and over in the ward where the school is situated

Level of education for those 16 and over	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
No qualifications	18	27
1-4 O levels/CSE/GCSEs and equivalents	37	37
NVQ Level 1, Foundation GNVQ, Basic Skills	9	10
5+ O level (Passes)/CSEs (Grade 1)/GCSEs (Grades A*-C), etc.	34	23
NVQ Level 2, and equivalents	16	17
Apprenticeship	6	7
2+ A levels and equivalents	17	8
NVQ Level 3 and equivalents	11	10
Degree and Higher degree	18	8
NVQ Level 4-5 and equivalents	5	3
Professional qualifications (non-degree)	14	8
Other vocational/work-related qualifications	18	17
Foreign qualifications	9	5

Table 7: Occupation in the ward where the school is situated

Occupation	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
Managers, directors and senior officials	10	7
Professional occupations	18	10
Associate professional and technical occupations	13	10
Administrative and secretarial occupations	12	12
Skilled trades occupations	9	11
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	8	9
Sales and customer service occupations	9	12
Process, plant and machine operatives	6	9
Elementary occupations	12	15

The religious education in the school

The school is a converter academy, converting in 2012, and was last inspected in 2009, when it was judged as outstanding by Ofsted; this judgement itself being sufficient for the academy conversion process to take place (DfE 2010). The number on role at the school is over 1550 with a capacity for a further 200 pupils. The school is bound by its funding agreement to provide religious education, which is in the main the teaching of Christianity with reference to the principal religions represented in Great Britain.

49% of pupils are girls and 51% boys, 1.1% have a statement of special educational needs or a health care plan (compared to 4.4% nationally), 15.1% have a language other than English as a first language (close to the national figure of 16.1%); although

only 3% of households in the area in which the school is situated speak a language other than English at home consistently. 18.3% of pupils have been eligible for free schools meals in the previous 6 years (compared to 29.1% nationally).

The school's attainment statistics show that it is above average in the Progress 8 scores and that 62% of pupils were entered for the EBacc compared to 48% for the local authority or 35% for England. At post 16 progress is judged to be average but it is of note that 68% of 6th Formers go on to Higher Education, compared to 53% for state schools/colleges in the LA and 51% for England. 27% go on to the top third ranked universities in the UK and 20% to Russell Group universities compared with less than 10% in the rest of the local authority and 12% nationally. The indication is that the school is drawing an intake broader than its traditional catchment area.

On its website the school states as part of its Aims and Ethos that¹¹:

The School is **committed to ensuring** that **British values** are fostered and underpin our practice both in the classroom and beyond. Consequently, students **explore spirituality** and whilst doing so develop their knowledge and **tolerance of other beliefs** ... Our students are provided with an array of **opportunities** to reap the rewards of our **richly diverse community** - they are taught to celebrate difference, resolve conflict and develop understanding of other cultures. Whilst **students grow** and flourish as individuals they also contribute to the world beyond the confines of East Midland Academy; in doing so they recognise that **British citizenship** involves making creative and positive contributions to society. We recognise that it is part of our role to **challenge extremist views** and **safeguard our students against radicalisation** and we feel that **educating** students is a powerful weapon against this.'

The curriculum statement, a document accessed through the website, says students:

¹¹ All words in bold were so on the website at the time of the research.

‘... follow a **core of subjects**, which allow them to pursue their learning through **creative, practical** and **technological** activities. We provide a curriculum, which offers students of all abilities a **traditional base** of **academic** learning.’

In Years 7 – 9 pupils do one hour per week of Religious Education called ‘Philosophy and Ethics’. The school has a Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education curriculum statement, which states:

‘[the school] is committed to ensuring that British values are fostered in the classroom and beyond. Consequently, students explore spirituality and whilst doing so develop their knowledge and tolerance of other beliefs. We help to nurture a clear understanding of right from wrong and highlight the consequences of unlawful actions according to British law, whilst clarifying its differences to religious law.’

Although it is not clear where the school clarified the differences between British law and ‘religious law’.

The school also has a Curriculum Policy, which informs parents of the school’s curriculum offer and commitment. Of religious education it states:

‘As a ‘Converter’ Academy, we seek to meet the requirements of the East Midland County Agreed Syllabus. The aim of religious education at East Midland Academy School is to enable students to understand the nature of religion, its beliefs and practices. In Key Stage 3 & 4 Religious Education is delivered through Humanities lessons.’

At the time of this research there was no RE taught from Year 9 to Year 11, despite the statement on the website to the contrary. The website also indicates in one place that there is no discrete religious education as it is delivered through other curriculum subjects and tutor time, which contradicts the curriculum statement on the schools website and the practice of the school at the time of the research.

The locally agreed syllabus is substantially based on the non-statutory National Framework for RE (QCA 2004). The Agreed Syllabus requires schools in the authority to focus on three religions at KS3:

- Christianity
- Buddhism and Sikhism

with other religions and world views being brought in as appropriate. It also has a significant focus on inter faith relations.

Religious education in the curriculum

The planning document for KS3 refers to philosophy, religion and ethics (PRE), and is not called Philosophy and Ethics as in the school's curriculum statement. The curriculum statement also says that RE as Philosophy and Ethics is in place from Years 7 – 9 but in the curriculum plan itself there is no PRE in Year 9, rather it is Citizenship. The school's website does not reflect that fact that Year 9 is part of KS4.

Table 8: The midterm plan for religious education at Years 7 and 8

Year 7	Topic
Autumn 1st half term	Introduction to PRE and Judaism
Autumn 2nd half term	Introduction to Philosophy
Spring 1st half term	Introduction to Christianity
Spring 2nd half term	Philosophy – Being Human
Summer 1st half term	Introduction to Islam
Summer 2nd half term	Philosophy and Science
Year 8	Topic
Autumn 1st half term	Introduction to PRE and Hinduism
Autumn 2nd half term	Introduction to Ethics
Spring 1st half term	Introduction to Buddhism
Spring 2nd half term	Buddhism and Ethics
Summer 1st half term	Introduction to Sikhism
Summer 2nd half term	Religion and Equality

The RE lead is one of a team of eighteen delivering the Humanities curriculum at KS3 and has a significant commitment to A Level teaching. Juwayriyah is the only specialist teacher and this has an impact on her planning:

‘...it’s a team of 18 humanities teachers, and the only specialist is basically is me... so I try to make it accessible to teachers’

Another significant element in her planning is a strong concern for what pupils need, although this is not specifically articulated in any detail; Juwayriyah states that the school needs:

‘[to make] sure that we stick to what the children need’

The curriculum plan splits religions by year into what are considered broadly occidental religions in Year 7, broadly oriental religions in Year 8. In practical terms Year 8 is the study of Dharmic or Indian religions. Each religion specific half term block is referred to as ‘Introduction to ...’, with one exception. In the second half of the Spring Half Term the study of Ethics is from a Buddhist perspective, bringing together the previous two half terms modules. It is recognised that students have studied some of these religions before as the teacher has been into a local primary school to see what they teach in RE and the delivery of RE is designed in order to avoid repetition.

Juwayriyah had ensured that both teachers and pupils have had an input into the planning of RE, developing a pragmatic curriculum:

‘I’ve taken feedback from the Humanities team, what they feel has worked and what hasn’t, what the children have said they’ve done this at primary, they’ve done this at primary, so I’ve done a lot of change tweaking year by year and we’ve ended up with this ‘cos last year we had to decide what are we going to stick with, what is it that worked?’

To gather pupil feedback, Juwayriyah has instituted a ‘youth SACRE’ in the school. In these ways she has:

‘... tried to sort of really meet everybody’s needs so its not just about delivery it about making sure the RE is relevant to the children and taking into account the subject knowledge of the staff that are going to be delivering.’

Juwayriyah’s narrative gives four clear compass points for her planning:

- what pupils are deemed to need
- what works for staff
- pupils – in relation to the school SACRE as a reference group
- the agreed syllabus (AS)

It is difficult, though, to establish that there is a link to the Agreed Syllabus, as there appears to be no Christianity at Year 8, the one religious tradition that RE is principally about according to the syllabus and the school’s own funding agreement. Likewise, it is difficult to determine a clear relationship to either the funding agreement, the locally agreed syllabus and the KS3 programme of study.

RE, pupils and their teachers

A recurring theme of the interview about the curriculum plan was pupils themselves. To understand what pupils experience in Primary school, Juwayriyah undertook research into a local primary. It was obvious to her that KS3 had previously repeated much of what had already been done. This led to a specific way of approaching the construction of the programme of study:

‘So I’ve tried to sort of look at where the gaps are in their knowledge and I’ve tried to also ... without intimidating the staff and the children.’

Here within the planning there appears to be a conscious moderation of the teacher’s own interests and that of staff and pupils and the following quote suggests that this involves the belief that the study of text and textual analysis which is thought to be important in RE is a bridge too far both for teachers who are not trained and pupils who have no real experience of text, such as PE teachers who are delivering RE:

‘I’m quite confident with teaching text based studies but I know everyone isn’t but I know what children tell me they don’t really understand they’ve never really looked at original you know Old Testament stories so I’ve had to be really careful about what I’ve put in front of them and so I think as a teacher who’s been teaching this for a while and coming into a school where RE hasn’t if the teachers the team have done their best to deliver lessons that they think are relevant...’

This gave an indication as to why the Agreed Syllabus is less prominent than would be expected:

‘... so I’ve used the living experiences of the children to try and guide me into deciding what should be taught, but that’s been hard because I’ve had to deviate from what the primary syllabus actually says and because we’re an academy I’ve been told I can ... we can teach what I want.’

Juwayriyah had entered into a process of negotiation taking into account pupils’ views, the curriculum and the school’s status as an academy and on this basis made choices. In the curriculum focused interview pupils/students are mentioned 18 times and teachers 31 times. Whilst students are a significant influence on the planning, teachers and the needs of teachers are seen to be more important.

It can be seen that the curriculum offer at Year 8 works on an assumed coherent and progressive model when it comes to the religions being studied:

- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Sikhism

The justification for this is that,

‘So the children can see there’s historical link between the three and how they’ve learnt about the story about the Buddha but quite often they don’t necessarily always understand that he used to be Hindu and he came from a Hindu family so the thinking

behind it was if they understand Hinduism then some of the practices and some of the beliefs and, as an RE specialist, I would talk to them about the caste system and then I would bring in things that are not necessarily there and with the knowledge that they will have covered some of these things in Primary. Obviously we are limited as well in terms of how much time we have but I like to give them a historical link between all the three religions. That's the reason.'

The next stage in the planning relates to the way that religions are introduced. Teachers are given resources to help them deliver the introductory modules to each religion:

'So each file (*computer stored*), each lesson is labelled with the title and what we decided was that we are going to concentrate on, areas like worship, Hinduism and the history of Hinduism and try to bring in how this links to each religion, how each religion, what connection does each religion have with Britain?'

Teachers can apply their own creative plan from the resources available and can also develop material. There is an influence discernable behind this curriculum approach, which is found in the phenomenology of religion as developed by Ninian Smart (Smart 1971). Smart puts together both a historical and thematic approach to the study of religions and he was influential in the development of RE in England from the late 1960s onwards (Copley 2008). This pattern is also there at Year 7 as Juwayriyah explains:

'In that order yes, yes we do. And the reason for that is just so they can see from the time ... so chronologically how those religions, the ideas have developed and influenced each other. And the relationship between the Jewish and the Christian faith and then Islam and its link to Christianity and Judaism and how Islam sees itself in comparison. That's the thinking behind it, so they don't get confused.'

There is a clear logic to the programme of study that replicates itself in both years, even though this concept of development – or successionism – has been questioned (Doniger 2009 and Solomon 2014). For the teacher, though, the idea that these religions develop historically in a certain pattern is clearly axiomatic and forms part

of a particular Islamic narrative about the relationship between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. There is no sense, though, that as pupils progress from Year 7 to Year 8 that the degree of difficulty in terms of knowledge acquisition or sophistication becomes greater.

About fifty per cent of the programme of study focuses on Philosophy and Ethics. Juwayriyah articulates three clear motivations for this: pupil interest, the developing of philosophical skills and language and the opportunity to develop thinking so that pupils can have a more coherent view of their world and the place of religion within it.

‘I have taken out a lot of the sort of basic teaching of each world religion ‘cos the children have told me they’ve learnt about this, we have to do it every year, so I’ve taken out the topics that they think (*I should*) and introduced this second topic, which is philosophy and ethics in the modern world.’

The introduction of Philosophy and Ethics serves the purpose of learning about and understanding religion with the further purpose of being prepared to live in a multicultural society, reflecting an imagined question of her pupils:

‘What does that mean to us as young people growing up in Britain, especially here in East Midland County, a very multicultural environment?’

This statement is made in some senses contrary to the evidence; see Tables 4 and 5 above. There is another motivation too to the introduction of Philosophy and Ethics:

‘Their discussions will come alive in this second half of the year.’

Philosophy and Ethics also allows teachers to link back to Year 7 and to explore Christian material in relation to the topic.

There is an overriding purpose, though, to the programme of study:

‘Whatever you hold on to your beliefs what is really importance, I think the tolerance thing, how does that ... that’s what its really done for me is reaffirmed that’s what I think education should be about.’

The concept ‘tolerance’ occurs nine times across the three interviews with Juwayriyah and key to this is her belief that: ‘learning about each other, opens up the door to more tolerance’.

Discussion

A prominent theme of the interviews with Juwayriyah was rooted in personal experience. There is clearly a narrative that relates specifically to growing up in a religiously observant Muslim household. The early memory of text and its religious power comes out strongly in the narrative but how that can be taught and planned for is seen as problematic. Therefore it is of note that ‘text’ itself does not play a prominent part in RE at KS3 and this has something to do with the teachers who will be delivering RE in Year 8. Pupils are expected to know something about the texts important to specific religions but not the texts in themselves. Text becomes much more important where Juwayriyah does the majority of her teaching, in the 6th Form. Such compromises in relation to text are not uncommon (Hampshire 2011).

There is a clear issue, though, for Juwayriyah as her own experience is driven by her emotive response to religious text and religious experience. She does not see how this can be communicated and there are tensions because she does not want to fabricate these experiences for her pupils. This is an issue that encapsulates the tension of religiously educating pupils in a secular context and one which has been debated since the 1960s (Copley 2005; 2008; Gearon 2013; 2014; Grimmitt 1987; 2000; Hammond and Hay et al 1990; Schools Council 1971). Whilst there is a tension in how Juwayriyah constructs the ‘problem’ of RE, the role of experience at the heart of religion, there appears to be clear overlap between the religions that Keene focuses on and those delivered at KS3, in contrast to focussing on the three identified in the Agreed Syllabus for this Key Stage.

There is no necessary perception here that pupils being taught are themselves religiously involved or connected, but their friends may be. The theme of learning

about ‘the other’ is one that is returned to and underlies the narrative about why no one religion should predominate over another.

The latter experience can be used to explain the resourcing of the units at her current school, which allows Juwayriyah freedom in relation to the delivery of the content but not the decisions made on what to teach in any given curriculum year. She had no modelling of what a KS3 programme of study should be like until her second appointment and speaking about the programme of study there is no mention of a locally agreed syllabus which the school had to follow.

The overwhelming narrative, though, focuses on five key figures. Two from school, two from the PGCE course and one from the second placement. All named. Interestingly there is no one specifically named person in relation to the degree she followed or to the person who she reacted to in her second school. In case of the latter it was not curriculum’s design that was an issue but rather classroom freedom.

In terms of the experience of Mr Morecambe’s and Ms De’ath’s style of teaching this appears to be the most significant area of encounter but there is also a curriculum element as well. The A Level changes that Ms De’ath brought to the 6th Form College have inflected the teaching of A Level RS choices at Juwayriyah’s current school. It is more difficult to draw a direct line from Juwayriyah’s secondary experience at KS3. The pattern of RE appears to have strong familial connections with what is taught, both in terms of the type of curriculum offer but also in terms of the relationships that Keene presupposes in his publications.

In her narrative about 6th Form she clearly states that one of the things that Ms De’ath did was to make the curriculum actually relevant to students at the college. This is a powerful memory as she can remember what was offered before Ms De’ath arrived and what the change meant, especially in terms of the numbers doing A Level RS. It is notable that pupils form an important part of the narrative surrounding the curriculum offer. This includes a deficit model – what pupils have not had but need – as well as a relevance model – what pupils think about the curriculum offer and what they would like to learn about. The latter is given weight by the school’s own

student SACRE¹², which has the opportunity to look at the RE provision, make comments and then effect change.

PGCE experience clearly had elements of planning but the planning at the second placement schools appears to have been more intuitive than planned on paper and it is difficult to discern what RE in that school was like in practice. Significantly, though, there was no mention of agreed syllabuses and whilst there is an understanding of the place of the locally agreed syllabus there is no following of the requirements of the syllabus in a planned way, whilst there may be coincidental common coverage.

The role of the school in the overall planning process is clearly negotiated. When the interviews took place there was a large number of teachers delivering RE and none of them were specialists, with the exception of Juwayriyah as the curriculum lead. Some were not even Humanities teachers, at least one being PE. This leads to a second layer of shaping along with pupils' own reflections. Therefore what excites and motivates Juwayriyah is in effect postponed to A Level teaching. It is of note that there is no KS4 RE or GCSE RS and the number of A Level students for RS is remarkable given the break in the tradition of studying RE.

Also significant is what is missing. It is acknowledged that the school does not follow the agreed syllabus because the teacher is exercising the freedoms that come with academy status. The curriculum policy of the school, though, at the time of this research, was inconsistent with that approach.

There is a caveat to this, and that is the commitment to seeing RE as a place for transmitting British values, along with other subjects. This is a key area in terms of Ofsted and the Prevent Agenda as part of Safeguarding (KCSIE 2016 and 2018 and related government publications). This does not explain Juwayriyah's belief that the key thing RE delivers is tolerance but they mutually support each other. The belief

¹² Student SACREs are not SACREs as understood in legislation, see footnote 12. They are rather reference groups made up of pupils who identify with a religious or non-religious tradition. They take different forms in different areas of England and not all local authorities or schools have one.

that learning about others leads to tolerance does in part explain why it is important for pupils to learn about more than three religions at this key stage.

There is also no mention of any local RE adviser or structures, although Juwayriyah is on the local SACRE¹³. As an academy the school has never been inspected or had a subject inspection that relates to or mentions RE. The last inspection as a local authority school showed that the school was rated outstanding for Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) education but religious education was not mentioned. Hence, it is appropriate to conclude that there are no specific pressures from the senior leadership of the school in the creation of the curriculum as there is no effective oversight of the planning and delivery process, although there is a process of classroom observation and pupil surveys.

It is also clear that the curriculum planning is not static and Juwayriyah, who is currently involved in Master's level research, is clearly reflecting on her learning in that context:

‘... (I) think that knowledge ... and that's why I like some of the recent work I'm reading about Michael Young's I know there's a lot of criticism against that sort of knowledge based curriculum but I feel that my own personal experience I can resonate with some of those ideas that they are trying to promote in schools and allowing children to come across pieces of text that they've never looked at before ...’

However, it is of note that this reaffirms her positive experience both in her own life and also in her experience of RE at secondary school and 6th Form and it is unlikely that non-specialist staff would be able to deliver such an RE offer without training.

Therefore it is reasonable to argue that there are four influences that have a direct impact on the planning of RE in the school at KS3, as set out in Figure 1. Whilst there

¹³ SACREs are Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education. They have four groups that represent four specific constituencies: A, religious traditions other than the Church of England; B, the Church of England; C, Teacher Associations; D, the local authority. SACREs are statutory bodies with their own legislative framework.

is much within the data that points to significant people this is more focussed on classroom management and style.

The significance of Juwayriyah's memory of a specific resource, and its approach to RE, could be seen as a reasonable explanation from the data for the basic RE entitlement in Years 7 and 8. This, though is not what she would teach as an RE specialist. The memory is one that gives her positive feeling about the subject, it is not one that specifically shapes the curriculum offer. The greater consideration is the absence of specialist RE teachers delivering the programme of study and the management of those, however dedicated, moderates what is offered to pupils. Pupils themselves have a clear role in informing the curriculum and how it develops, through the school SACRE that functions as a reference group for Juwayriyah as the RE lead.

The appeal to British Values is important but not dominant enough within the narrative to be counted as a major influence despite the emphasis placed upon it in the curriculum statement of the school, but Juwayriyah's belief about the importance of tolerance does. As already stated, there is no clear link to the Agreed Syllabus that can be established and the lack of any accountability in terms of the curriculum offer means that the RE lead, as the designer of the offer, has their experience of RE to draw upon in order to make sense of the provision.

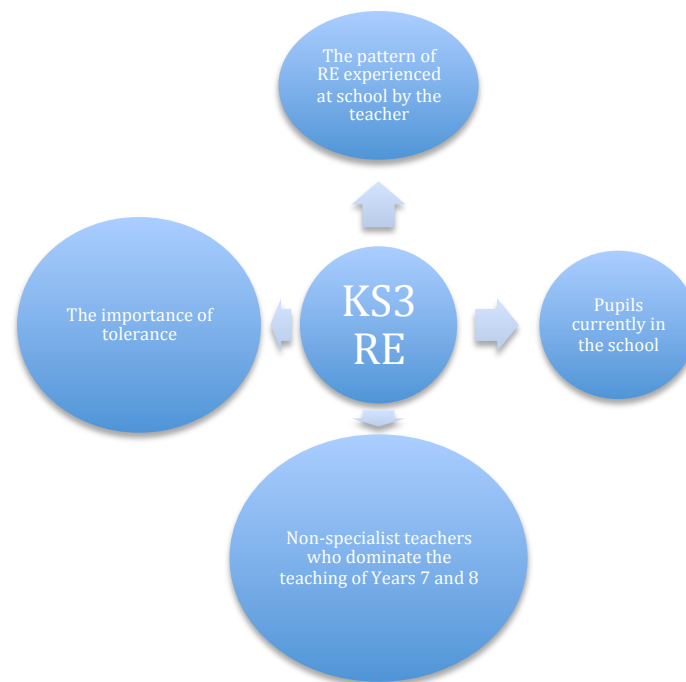
Conclusion

Figure 1, below, provides a representation of the major influences over the planning of the KS3 curriculum offer for RE. It is not possible to unpick the specifics of the planning process, there was a scheme of work when Juwayriyah arrived at the school but there has been an iterative process that led to the programme's construction at the time of the interviews.

Whilst her curriculum plan is negotiated, this is the first time that she has had responsibility for a programme of study. Juwayriyah is the curriculum lead but this is based in negotiation with staff and pupils. It is also driven by the desire for pupils to learn tolerance from learning about a variety of religious traditions supported by learning in Philosophy and Ethics.

The creation of the curriculum offer is not *ex nihilo* but based in her experience of RE both as a pupil, a student and a teacher. The planning ignores the requirement of the one document the school is committed to following but there is no mechanism in the school to either sort that out or to challenge what has been planned and this itself is cause for further reflection.

Figure 1: influences on Juwayriyah’s curriculum decisions – showing differential level of influence



Lord Elliot School

Introduction

Lord Elliot School is a coeducational secondary school currently in partnership with another, more successful secondary school, as at its last Ofsted the school was given notice to improve. The year before the research was undertaken, it had become an all-

through-school as there was a need to build another primary school in the area due to population growth. This case study will focus exclusively on RE in the secondary phase. As the school is a maintained secondary school with no religious designation, religious education has to be delivered according to the locally agreed syllabus. The teacher in this case study had been at the school one year when the research was undertaken. She was not trained as an RE teacher and has no academic background in Theology or Religious Studies. Many of the questions asked put her beyond her comfort zone, as she had not previously considered some of the questions, especially when being questioned about curriculum planning.

The secondary number on role is 900 and at the time of the research the school was considered by the DfE to be well below average.

Yooft

Yooft is of Ghanaian descent, being born in Metropolitan North to Ghanaian parents. She was brought up as a Roman Catholic Christian in a predominantly white area of Metropolitan North, being one of the few Black children in her school. Her primary school was Catholic but not her secondary school. Her memories of primary Catholic religious education form around ritual as opposed to content. When asked about what she remembered of her Catholic education she said,

‘Lots of prayers. I don’t know if its good or not but ... but ... no because I still remember them, so yeah the things’

This faith induction was clearly associated with school and not home. When asked about whether she had learned to pray at home she had no clear memory: ‘No, I don’t remember them doing it’.

She offered a reflection about how learning by rote may be a positive educational tool:

‘... and I suppose it’s something that I don’t do much of, but it would probably be better if I did because it would probably stick with the students as well because they learn; if you learn something, you keep on learning it you it stays in your head ...’

Going back to her primary schooling she concludes:

‘I still remember it so yeah, we had fun too, I do remember the prayers, a lot of them, and a good trip to Assisi as well. That was good.’

It is interesting that Yoofi uses the word *trip* as opposed to *pilgrimage*, which may indicate that this was more sight seeing than an act of religious devotion or quest. It did influence what she thought RE was supposed to deliver.

‘I think the problem with RS now is it has become very much a text book and classroom subject and it needs to be brought into the real world so people can actually see what really goes on. Because it’s become ‘this is a book you learn’ ... this now lets move on to the next bit ... but we don’t actually experience it.’

She has no memory of secondary RE, except that she was part of a group that did GCSE at lunchtimes. Yoofi, had no memory of what the content of that GCSE might have been with the exception of ethics and this itself becomes a motivator for her RE teaching. She also remembered her teacher and believed that it must have been fun because the course was extra curricular:

‘I can remember her name, her name was Miss Lesser. She wore glasses and I want to say she had blonde hair but I might be wrong. But the lessons I can’t remember, but I just know I must have enjoyed it to want to go at lunch time, because I know we were only allowed because we were the 3rd or 2nd year doing GCSE ... so it’s a long time back but I know there wasn’t space on the curriculum to do it within the options we had ... so if we wanted to do it we had to do it in our own time, that is what I do remember. ‘

Yoofi did not carry on with Religious Studies to A Level, having got a C at GCSE. Rather she did A Level English, History and Mathematics. After A Level she went on

to read History and German at William's College, Metropolitan. Her decision to read History was rooted in her reading of novels and links to her own African roots.

Her love of History led her on to do a PGCE in History at Principality Institute of Education, part of Principality University, although from childhood she had always wanted to be a teacher. Yoofi's principal desire was to be a History teacher but circumstances led her to teach a number of subjects, one being RE:

'[I] came back up to Metropolitan. Didn't get a job straight away so I did a bit of supply work so I'd done all different for the first term, did lots of different subjects so when I got my first job it was a Humanities job so I had to teach History, Geography and RE and did that for two terms in Central Metropolis. And then at the end of that contract went on to work at a school in South Metropolis for a year and cos that school was closing ... but in my mind ... I just applied for a job so I just went for it. I needed money so I went to work in South Metropolis for a year and then as I walked in ... I was head of History and also taught RE GCSE and I taught the Welsh Board specification for that one. And I walked in and I had year 11 class straight away so I had to think on my feet for that one, and bearing in mind when I got to that point my only qualification in RS ... and probably still is till this day was I had a GCSE.'

It was economic necessity that led Yoofi to become a teacher of RE, as opposed to History specifically or Humanities more generally:

'... and then I went to an agency and I just said: 'okay find me a job' and I ended up with a job in East Metropolis and I actually applied for a History job but they gave me an RE job and they said: 'do you want it', and I said 'okay', cos I needed the job, so I took it.'

When asked whether she'd had RE specific CPD Yoofi replied:

'[RE] CPD? I'm trying to think of specific, that's actually quite bad isn't it but I haven't done much of it I don't think.'

She did though participate in local networks:

‘... we used to have network meetings in East Metropolis so we worked with other RE teachers, with the RE adviser having discussions about things.’

Yoofi also went to visit other heads of RE in the local authority for help and support, especially when she was told that the school did not need to teach RE anymore. She also attended a conference for secondary RE teachers run by a national body that she found useful. Much of this was curtailed, though, by family commitments and having to bring up her children.

It was being aware of her own surroundings and linking that to pupils’ own contexts that acts as a form of training, with her emphasis on the importance of experience. Often she would visit places of worship that she passed when they were open. As she says:

‘... there are all different places we can walk into, what is it about these? why is it that people convene in places? why do they want to meet here? what is so special about this?’

For Yoofi religious experience is a common denominator and unifier across all religions and she described herself as a ‘catholic universalist’:

‘I would definitely say ... I’ve said Universalist and someone that believes that all ways can get to God ... I’m catholic with a small c definitely. I think I’ve always been like it.’

She expresses this a positive in RE:

‘... some of my choices could show that I don’t like to follow the traditional path necessarily, so I’m just ... I don’t know ... when did I start teaching? ‘97, so I think I’ve always been like it to be honest with you. I think it’s just I don’t like being pigeon holed really. I kinda want ... and I want students ... to know that they can ... we should be free to express how we are ... we don’t have to necessarily fit in to what

other people think we should be doing. Which sometimes can rock the boat a little bit in schools.’

Yooft, though, goes further as she hides her ‘Catholicism’ from those at school, both teachers and pupils:

‘I’ve just told you that I’m a Catholic but no one at school would know that because I haven’t said it to them ...’

One reason for this may be the experience she had at her previous school, an experience she related with great emotion, when she was accused of trying to indoctrinate pupils by telling them that for Christians Easter was more significant than Christmas.

She does though regularly attend Mass at her local parish church, whilst being happy to pray in other places of worship. Therefore, in terms of practice, whilst she denies being an ‘orthodox Catholic’ she is still attached to that religious form. What she cannot hide is her ethnicity and this clearly becomes a motivation to teach where she does:

‘I suppose I’ve been in the same place as they [pupils] have and I can understand why some of them don’t like it [RE] and I will say: “well I understand that but I also think that at the end of the day we have to live in a society where we’ve got lots of different people”’.

In this way the commitment to working with ‘young people who look like me’ in a globalised world is a significant part of Yooft’s identity as a teacher. Whereas the religious core of that identity is hidden from staff and students her Blackness cannot be. This resonates with her desire to do more study on de-colonialism. Her broader implicit theology appears to resonate with the African experience of Christianity in the UK (Chike 2007), where there is a sense of encounter with Divinity being a constant, but filtered through the prism of religions. Yooft comments:

‘I think there has to be [something to connect with] ... we are all looking at the same thing but we are looking at it from different perspectives and, its like: ‘why is it someone looks at it from that perspective?’ and I think: when I’ve looked at it ... and I keep on going and coming back to the original faiths and looking at why they all feel and why they ... are all similar and then ... why is it looking at eastern [religions] ... and think they are different when in fact a lot of the things ... they can all be linked and there are some similarities that cross all six so why is it that we think there’s actually difference?’

This universalism in part explains why she subverts the school’s programme of study to run a parallel programme but with the introduction of ‘Eastern’ religions.

The school

The school is situated in a predominantly White area, which is ethnically less diverse than the local authority as a whole. Whilst the majority of people identified themselves as Christian in the local authority at the last census, fewer than half did so where the school is situated, being more likely to identify themselves as having No Religion or Not Stated. The area where the school is situated is also less religiously diverse than the local authority, with a substantially greater proportion of professionals and those in associated professions than the borough. To that extent, the school is more diverse than the locality and whilst 86.7% of the local population have English as their first or main language, the school has 43.6% of its pupils with English as an additional language, and nearly 50% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Yoofi noted the diverse nature of the school, where there were significant numbers of pupils from the Horn of Africa as well as West Africa.

As noted above, Ofsted placed the school in Notice to Improve and the report stated that the school had high levels of persistent absence for White British pupils, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) was poor, with insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop in these areas – especially as the school did not promote Fundamental British Values as expected by inspectors.

Table 9: Ethnicity in the ward where the school is situated

Ethnicity	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
White (all categories)	53.5	66.2
Mixed (all categories)	7.4	6.5
Asian (Indian sub-continent)	2.7	1.4
Asian (Chinese and other)	6.5	3.7
Black (all categories)	27.1	20.8
Other (all categories)	2.6	1.4

Table 10: Religion in the ward where the school is situated

Religion	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
Christianity	52.8	48.7
Buddhist	1.3	1.1
Hindu	2.4	0.0
Jewish	0.2	0.0
Muslim	6.4	5.6
Sikh	0.2	0.0
Other religion	0.5	1.3
No religion	27.2	37.8
Not stated	8.9	10.5

Table 11: Level of education for those 16 and over in the ward where the school is situated

Level of education – aged over 16	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
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No qualifications	17.7	11.5
Level 1	11.1	10.8
Level 2	12.5	13.2
Level 3	10.8	8.3
Level 4 and above	38.0	48.3
Apprenticeship	1.4	1.0
Other	8.5	3.8

Table 12: Occupation in the ward where the school is situated

Occupation	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
Managers, directors and senior officials	9.7	10.2
Professional occupations	22.6	28.6
Associate professional and technical occupations	16.5	20.9
Administrative and secretarial occupations	11.8	9.7
Skilled trades occupations	8.1	8.7
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	9.4	7.7
Sales and customer service occupations	7.6	7.8
Process, plant and machine operatives	4.1	4.7
Elementary occupations	10.2	6.1

The school had a strong commitment to a ‘rich and varied curriculum that inspires and engages students is the most important thing a school can offer’, according to its website. The school’s curriculum plans were on the website. The information about the RE curriculum is taken from the time that the research was undertaken. In terms of curriculum planning for Key Stage 3, at that point in time referred only to Years 7

and 8, with Key Stage 4 starting in Year 9. The focus on GCSE was as a result of being inspected, either Section 5 or Section 8 thirteen times in fifteen years. In the year the research was undertaken only 25% of pupils gained an A* - C at GCSE English and Maths, and whilst the school entered almost half of its students for all EBacc subjects only 18% of students attained a C or above in all five subject areas. The constant scrutiny of the school by DfE and Ofsted had led to the curriculum as a whole being focussed on the accountability measures – hence all assessment in English, Maths and Science from Year 7 onwards is framed in terms of GCSE assessment criteria and the papers that pupils will sit at Year 11.

Religious education in the school

The statutory requirement for religious education in the school is in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus.

The syllabus requires schools to dedicate 45 hours per year to RE and has six content requirements, one for each major religious tradition: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism, with five additional units, two bridging units and three others focusing on interfaith engagement, spirituality and the creative arts, and questions of origin. It is clear that there is no intention to meet the statutory requirement:

‘So, I think I’m ... cos I’ve the AS [agreed syllabus] for South Metropolitan, have I used it? No, but I know ... and I have looked at it ... and I thought ... that is one of the reasons I decided to move some of the units because the East Metropolis agreed syllabus, I’d worked with that one before and so I knew that we were looking at East Metropolitan ... about making it diverse.’

When asked about whether she had used or thought of introducing the bridging modules, Yoofi responded:

‘No because when I started I knew of it, it’s how we met Molly [the LA RE Advisor]. Afterward ... but I didn’t have it before because the syllabus I had was the 2001, so it wasn’t the most up to date syllabus. So there wasn’t an up to date one in school. So

when I came in [to the school] I didn't know it ... so I used the one that I already had, which was not for this borough but it had ...'

Instead of using the locally agreed syllabus she worked on negotiating a model with those already teaching RE in the school. With reference to Year 8:

'Most of it was here before I got here, and I ... just the last ... the 3rd unit and the 2nd unit are the ones I thought we needed to introduce [them] because they weren't being represented on the curriculum anywhere. So the 2nd unit was on eastern religions and the 3rd one was on the media and religion in the media, and I thought was something that needed to be covered. But the other 2 had been there already.'

As can be seen from Table 13, below, the narrative around the programme of study was confusing as it did not tally with the curriculum plan that was on the school's website. Yoofi had subverted the existing curriculum plan so that non-specialist colleagues taught the published programme and she and a newly qualified teacher, who had a PGCE in RE, taught a modified version. The alternative curriculum plan can be found in Table 14, below.

Yoofi sets out the process of engagement with the department that she encountered on first coming to the school:

'So when I started I felt we needed to do something immediate because, to be honest there was lots of it around, lots of misconceptions in the media and I felt that's something that we should be bring down because its something that comes through when you're looking at GCSEs with the thematic ideas, so I wanted to bring it in. So I made the decision that I think we should do it and then the Ethics was already in there and the Eastern Religions they weren't touched on, so they weren't doing Buddhism or Sikhism or Hinduism and I felt that we needed to have a reference to that especially in South Metropolis.'

Although she has no actual knowledge of the area and lived at some distance from it she did not feel the need to evidence her decision, it was simply axiomatic.

The model informing the changes worked on a presumed deficit relative to context. Within this it is also important to note that there is no curriculum scrutiny by the senior leadership team or the governing body. Hence, that there is a discrepancy between the public facing curriculum offer and the actual curriculum offer for the majority of pupils is not picked up and the website remains unchanged.

Table 13: Key Stage 3 Programme of Study for RE as published

Year/ Module	1	2	3	4	5
7	Critical religious education	Christianity – beliefs and practices	Christianity - History	Islam – beliefs and practices	Islam – belonging to the Islamic faith
Assessment	Extended writing	Extended writing	Extended writing	Extended writing	Extended writing
Skills	Empathy, evaluation, expression, application of knowledge	Empathy, evaluation, expression, application of knowledge	Empathy, evaluation, application of knowledge, investigation	Empathy, evaluation, expression, application of knowledge	Empathy, evaluation, application of knowledge, comparison, analysis
8	Poverty and charity	Evil and suffering	Ethics	Prejudice and discrimination	Life as a Muslim in Britain
Assessment	Extended writing	Extended writing	<i>GCSE style 8 mark question + extended writing</i>	<i>GCSE style 8 mark question + extended writing</i>	<i>GCSE style 8 mark question + extended writing</i>

Skills	Evaluation, comparison, analysis, application of knowledge	Evaluation, comparison, analysis, application of knowledge	Exam technique, evaluation, comparison, analysis, application of knowledge, inter-pretation	Exam technique, evaluation, comparison, analysis, application of knowledge	Exam technique, evaluation, comparison, analysis, application of knowledge, inter-pretation
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Table 14: Alternative Key Stage 3 Programme of Study for RE

Year/ Module	1	2	3	4	5
7	Critical religious education	Christianity – beliefs and practices	Christianity – History, including Judaism	Islam – beliefs and practices	Islam – belonging to the Islamic faith
Assessment	Extended writing	Extended writing	Extended writing	Extended writing	Extended writing
Skills	Empathy, evaluation, expression, application of knowledge	Empathy, evaluation, expression, application of knowledge	Empathy, evaluation, application of knowledge, investigation	Empathy, evaluation, expression, application of knowledge	Empathy, evaluation, application of knowledge, comparison, analysis
8	Ethics	Eastern	Religion and	Prejudice and	Life as a

		Religions	the media	discrimination	Muslim in Britain
Assessment	Extended writing	Extended writing	<i>GCSE style 8 mark question + extended writing</i>	<i>GCSE style 8 mark question + extended writing</i>	<i>GCSE style 8 mark question + extended writing</i>
Skills	Evaluation, comparison, analysis, application of knowledge	Evaluation, comparison, analysis, application of knowledge	Exam technique, evaluation, comparison, analysis, application of knowledge, interpretation	Exam technique, evaluation, comparison, analysis, application of knowledge	Exam technique, evaluation, comparison, analysis, application of knowledge, interpretation

Yoofi also mentioned Judaism in Year 7 and that the school had moved to a four unit structure from a five unit structure to allow more sustained learning at greater depth, but that structure had not changed for RE according to the website.

Yoofi's process was broadly to look for what she saw to be a gap and to plug it within the existing structure, so as not to disturb those teachers who were there before, but had no subject background. When asked whether the decisions she had made were in any way team decisions she was reticent to respond but then said:

'Um, OK, so where I've worked before I'm used to working collaboratively but here it was 'as head of department you do all the planning, all the resourcing, everything'. So if I brought it in I had to then resource it. Which, okay is ... I've brought it in but a lot of it I'd had previously ... so I've just brought it over wholesale and just said OK I'm going to use it because I had it.'

When asked about why she had brought in a module on religion and the media, she stated, even though they will meet this topic again in GCSE:

‘... it [media] impacts on their sense of self and their identity, because a lot of them don’t realise that they’re just ... oh ... such and such happened, but why do you believe that? They have ... I want them to challenge I want them to challenge their preconceived ideas.’

But there were other motivations too:

‘... and I thought it was an interesting one’

‘... [and] because [of] Islamophobia and I guess ... if you think about British values ... that’s something that we need to talk to them about as well’

Here there are some themes that become important. Pupils’ attitude to religion, which she notes elsewhere, was not positive; that there was a need to do more earlier to challenge pupils; and, thirdly, the issue of British values, which Ofsted had identified as ‘standing in the way’ of pupils’ development in its latest report. In this context, Yoofi also holds the belief that by teaching in themes it is possible to have higher pupils engagement. She recognises the importance of subject knowledge but juxtaposes it as dry, when compared to themes:

‘... ... I don’t want it to be just looking the religion, because looking at each ... they are all different yes but ... if you just say we are going to just do Judaism then were are just doing Hinduism, Buddhism that would be a very dry I think scheme of work and I think there needs to be a bit of variety in there.’

Talking about Year 9 she noted:

‘And so it has been, this year has been quite monotonous and at times a bit dry, because it ... you know ... this took us from September to, I think, it was even after Christmas.’

None of this, however, deviates from the need to ensure that pupils are GCSE ready, enjoyment and engagement were a means to this end. Ultimately Yoofi and her department would be judged by their GCSE results.

There was another issue, noted above, and that surrounds resources. On fourteen occasions, Yoofi mentioned the lack of resources to be able to effectively teach the RE she wants pupils to experience. In her estimation the department has been under resourced at Key Stage 3, historically, because of the need to ensure that GCSE was adequately resourced. But quite what her overall vision of RE was, what underpins it, was not clear. She does differentiate between RE and Citizenship, though:

‘RE that’s different from citizenship, it’s about questioning and getting them to question what they think might be the status quo and actually say if that’s the case how and why and always ... that’s one of my things I always say you have to question everything and not just accept what is put in front of you ... I think that’s what’s possibly different from the Citizenship area of the curriculum.’

She states:

‘I mean it’s [transcendence] one of the words we use all the time, actually.’

Nevertheless, the main outcome for RE is that pupils are ‘respectful’, which she repeats six times, and ‘tolerant’, which she repeats three times. This, to a certain extent sheds light on why there was a need to ensure that RE was broadened out to include Eastern Religions and Judaism. The other themed units could be adapted to ensure that a breadth of religions were included, but this would be down to an individual teacher’s own knowledge, interest and skills.

Discussion

Yoofi’s curriculum construction is based on two main pillars, what was there before and what she brought with her from her sixteen years’ experience in another school. This is a result of a particular type of negotiation where other teaching members of the department, none of them trained or qualified in RE at the time of her joining the

school, express their desire to carry on teaching what they feel comfortable with. This leads to two curriculum plans for RE at Key Stage 3, one that remains from the previous head of RE and negotiated with key members of staff and the one followed by Yoofi and her NQT. Even within the modules of the same name – the continuing curriculum – the content of the module is different in emphasis. This calls into question the concept of entitlement and the government's directive that a school's curriculum should be on the school's website so that parents can see what their pupils are learning.

What she brought into the school was what she was comfortable with, as she had developed these teaching units over time. Yoofi clearly saw their importance in terms of the overall education of her pupils. This is inflected with her experience of the changing nature of society around her, speaking about how she was one of the few Black pupils in her school to intentionally going and working in schools with a significant proportion of their pupils being Black. To this extent RE is there to prepare pupils to live in this more globalised world. There is, though, an influence on the curriculum from her own worldview, which esteems all religions as ways to God when those religions are being authentic. Therefore the demands of 'GCSE ready' are mitigated by a greater purpose, which points pupils to the transcendent.

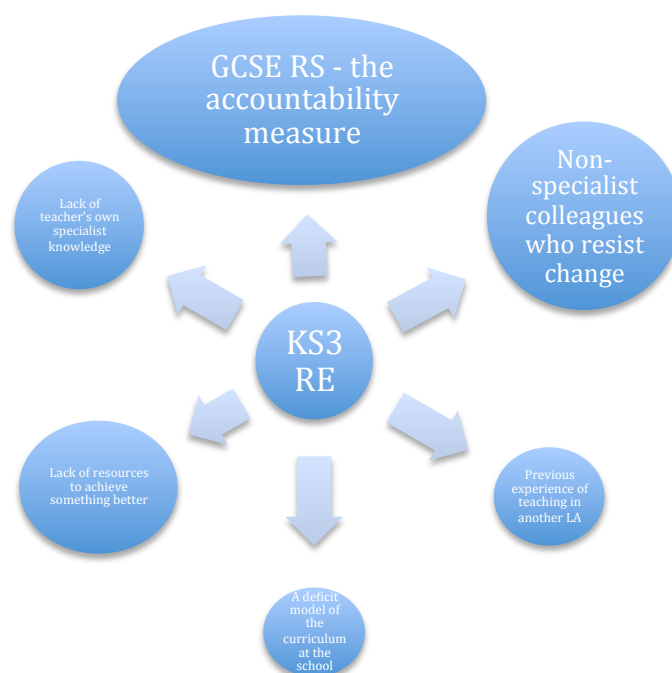
The extended writing tasks for assessment were part of the schools' own policy to improve literacy in a school where nearly half of all pupils have English as a second language. Increasingly, however, throughout Year 8 assessment is progressively focused on the need for pupils to understand GCSE criteria and, as noted, not just in RE.

Given her love of history and sense of her own Blackness it was notable that there was no mention of Black Theology or African Liberation Theology. As she has no formal background in Theology and Religious Studies this might not be surprising. Her own studies in African decolonisation focused on political and not religious narratives. What was clear was that she has a strong sense of pupils' entitlement that was shaped by previously working in East Metropolis and her own experience of moving from North to South Metropolis.

It is also clear that the dual programme of study came about through the need to negotiate with other teachers, teachers who pre-dated her in the school. Along with this there was the recognition that no one was looking at the curriculum offer other than herself and her department. This lack of scrutiny was an opportunity that may then work as a basis for change in the long term.

Along with the above Yoofi had no formal qualification or training in RE, no theoretical underpinnings of curriculum design in RE. As a result of this she appeared to lack the authority that someone with a more secure academic background in Theology and Religious Studies might have. Therefore she became resource dependent in a situation where there are few if any resources. This led to a module on Eastern Religions that demanded little subject knowledge, as there was only time to ‘skim’ the topic as a whole. Where resources were richer as a result of the topic being covered in GCSE RS, such as religion and the media, the curriculum offer was able to achieve more – especially in terms of challenging pupils about their own view of the world. Figure 2, below, sets out the influences on Yoofi’s planning indicating relative importance of each influence.

Figure 2 Influences on Yoofi’s programme of study – showing the differential level of influence



Conclusion

Yoofi is an RE teacher by circumstance and has no formal background in RE. To this extent, she is unsure about much of the area of religious education in the secondary school context. During the two interviews she constantly gasped at what was being asked because these were issues that she had never thought about. Opportunities for professional development were curtailed as she had a growing family and this she recognised. ‘Qualified by experience’, she expressed a love for the subject, more so than History her first love, because she felt freer to achieve what she thought was important for her as a teacher: to develop young people as tolerant and respectful; as a way of building a better society and being a model to Black young people in the way that she interacted with them and promoted their sense of potential and achievement.

Whilst these were her motivations, it is also the case that she could only work within the context that she found herself in. As this was the first year of her teaching in this school, one that was under constant scrutiny by the government and Ofsted, meaning the school moved from crisis to crisis, these aspirations were moderated by others; both individuals and forces beyond her control. Her one hope was the NQT, who Yoofi ‘is training in her ways’. This implied that there is a long-term plan that will transform the subject, but given the historic and current attainment at the school this may prove to be more difficult than imagined.

This case study exemplifies the importance of negotiation between members of staff about the curriculum offer to pupils, which may have more to do with teachers’ own interests and needs than those of their pupils. It also exemplifies the impact that the accountability measure has on schools that are seen to be making insufficient progress by government.

Queen Elizabeth’s School

Introduction

Queen Elizabeth’s is a converter academy that forms part of a multi academy trust (MAT) not based within its own local authority. It caters for 1,650 pupils from the

ages of 11 – 18, with 115 of those in the 6th Form. At the time of the research, the school was considered to be below average by the DfE on the basis of its Progress 8 score. Almost half of all pupils were entered for the EBacc measure, above the local authority percentage and well above the England average. However, 13% of all pupils attained A* - C in all EBacc subjects, well below the local authority average and below the England average. 18.5% had English as an additional language, above the national average. Similarly, more than a third were eligible for free school meals, 5% above the national average. Nevertheless, the school had lower absence levels or persistent absence than that nationally. The school was judged by Ofsted to be good at the inspection undertaken in the year when the research was undertaken. The report, though, highlighted the Humanities department - in which RE is situated – as one where pupils made insufficient progress.

Jacob

Jacob was born and brought up in Station City and comes from a non-religious background. When asked he stated:

‘So my parents, no. My grandparents, paternal grandparents have a kind of Christian background, Church of England background erm more so than we had sort of growing up ... but apart from that, aside from that, none, nothing with anything significance.’

Jacob did not intend to become a teacher, certainly not of RE, and he had no memory of religious education at primary school and little at secondary school:

‘There was ... from memory there was just lots of watching films. There was lots of watching films and talking about the ... sometimes very tenuous connections between ... you know ... how Billy Elliot demonstrates social class and that kind of thing.’

However, he believed that his teachers were subject specialists:

... the RE teachers were subject specialists ... but yes ... it felt like: “this is the interesting thing that I’ve been thinking about lets talk about this interesting thing”, as opposed to a structured progression of development throughout time.’

Jacob went on to do full course GCSE. All pupils in his school did the Short Course and he, with another twenty pupils opted to do the full course as a way of avoiding doing physical education. He had no recollection of what he did in his GCSE RS, other than he avoided PE. He went on to do A Level:

‘So my A levels I Chemistry, History, French and Spanish erm so like I said I started my A Levels with absolutely no idea what I wanted to do so it is about breadth ... it is about breadth and things I enjoyed erm so yeh.’

Breadth comes up as a theme in his narrative about RE within the school. He uses the term ‘broad’ in the context of ‘broad and balanced RE’ eleven times in all. He saw this not only as a characteristic of good RE but also as a virtue. After secondary school he went to university at Elite Principality to read politics because he liked the place and the course, as it allowed him to spend two of his four years as Côte Ouest Gallic:

‘I ... found out that they had a politics degree that meant you could spend two years in Côte Ouest ... I spent four years between Principality and Côte Ouest.’

At university he was heavily involved in debating and travelled the world both taking part in competitive debating and being a judge. One theme that he picked up throughout his life was that of his love of ideas:

‘I always at school, through university and beyond I liked ideas. Erm ... I always enjoyed ideas ... erm ... I always enjoyed challenging ideas, challenging conceptions, preconceptions and that sort of thing ... erm ... and then I think really when I went to university it was the kind of freedom.’

After university, Jacob was unsure of what he wanted to do and moved to working in the third sector:

‘[I] left university with no idea what I wanted to do but I’d been doing lots of debating at university so I went to Metropolis and worked for ... a charity that provides debating clubs after school in school.’

At the charity, he started out in an administrative role but what he really enjoyed was working with young people and it was suggested to him that he might like to go into teaching. As a result he applied to Teach First¹⁴ and was placed in the school he was in at the time of the research. His initial subject was Citizenship because of his politics background, but he realised that it was being increasingly marginalised as the school responded to an HMI inspection of RE. For Jacob RE was a strategic move so that he could deliver some Citizenship, as there was less scope for this in History and Geography.

He was committed to teaching RE and when asked what he thought the consequences of removing RE from the curriculum might be he replied:

‘... if pupils don’t learn about diversity of cultures and religions and traditions that’s going to be a massive detriment to society in terms of people’s ability to engage with a variety of individuals ... I think that generally RE plays a massive part in tolerance and understanding and those things, and society would be a lot better off if actually people more consistently did RE better than removing [it] completely, I think that would be a massive loss.’

The focus is clearly on the civic value of RE and the benefit for socially situated young people as they grow up. There is nothing specifically about the ideas and experiences embodied in religious traditions that interest him, although he did imagine a different vision of the RE curriculum when asked about the systematic introduction of worldviews into RE, discussed in relation to the CoRE (2018) report recommendations:

¹⁴ Teach First is a salaried professional entry scheme leading to Qualified Teacher Status and, in some cases to PGCE and M-level credits; see: <https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/explore-my-options/teacher-training-routes/school-led-training/school-direct-salaried>

‘... if there was a curriculum based around issues that ... you would include in that curriculum issues from worldviews that were specific to that perspective to that particular issue, so you wouldn’t be learning about every possible view. So you wouldn’t have ... a unit on [like on] Judaism ... you wouldn’t have a unit on Marxism but ... you would learn Marxist perspectives if you were looking at a unit on Social Justice.’

For Jacob, the engagement with ideas and with debate was a key feature of his teaching and saw himself as being able to both present and challenge different viewpoints:

‘ They have no idea what I think because I will take the position of absolutely every perspective so they never know whether what I am doing at that time is what I actually think or whether I am playing devil’s advocate because it doesn’t matter because I take on with equal conviction such a range of positions.’

As a result of this, he has led CPD across the school on how to engage pupils in debate. Jacob is clear that he can be wholly neutral in his approach. Not having a faith background means he believes that he can be objective and broad and balanced in what he and his colleagues provide. It also acts as a position from which Jacob criticises other RE teachers:

‘You see, I feel that the problem sometimes with RE community is that it is easy for an individual or a school to unwittingly fall into a more instructive interpretation of RE than a broad and balanced discursive interpretation of RE.’

This presumed neutrality of agnostic and atheist RE teachers has been noted before (Hampshire 2012). When asked about the epistemological base for what he taught, and what was designed in terms of the curriculum, he pointed to colleagues:

‘I’ve always been the least specialist so whilst I’m logistically managing a lot of my colleagues who have more theological backgrounds have taken the lead on resources and things like that because of their experience and the wealth of their knowledge.’

Jacob had never undertaken any RE specific CPD in his time as an RE teacher but he did have first hand experience of religious traditions that he drew upon in the classroom. As part of his work in the third sector he went to Nepal to work with schools. He drew upon this experience in his own teaching but not in his overall curriculum design. Jacob also drew upon his experience of schooling as he went to a multicultural and multi-religious secondary school. Even so, he did not mix with pupils from backgrounds vastly different to his own. His appreciation of the multicultural and multi-religious nature of his school was more notional than actual (see: Reay, Croizier and James 2011). None of his friends, that he remembers were religious, and if they were they were like him in that they were open to questioning everything:

‘... in my class ... [the] top set was still very monocultural ... So actually my group of friends thinking back on it, I’ve never done this before, was quite monocultural ... as well, but also, as well in kind of religious sense lots of my friends were very similarly agnostic bordering on atheist’ ... urm ... but some people, you know, with a very strong religious background but who were very open to you know challenge and things like that I don’t think lots of my friends were very much like me in a questioning everything sort of sense. I don’t think they would really have been able to survive with us if they hadn’t been, you know, open to fundamental kind of questions and things like that.’

However, for Jacob the key to his teaching is the relationship with pupils rather than the curriculum content per se:

‘Very much so, very much so. Like I said my teaching ... my background of being taught ... relates most to the teachers where I had that very personal relationship ... so that influences me to want to have that ... you know I am not afraid of having a similarly personal relationship with you know the pupils that I teach.’

In one sense the curriculum structure as a midterm plan is only significant to Jacob, as the curriculum lead, if it allows him to teach in the way that he wants. As there is no close scrutiny of the programme of study at KS3 and the topics to be covered are

broad, he is able to do this. The curriculum is a means to a specific end and is not an end in itself.

Two years before the first interview, Jacob had been appointed as a member of his school's local authority SACRE in Group C.

The school

Queen Elizabeth's is situated in an area that has a higher White and Christian population than that of the local authority and is significantly less diverse. The area has a greater percentage of those in higher paid, professional and skilled occupations than the rest of the local authority area, and a higher percentage of the population not identifying with a religion than the percentage for the local authority, and for England as a whole (24.7%), see Tables 15 – 16 below. Jacob noted in both of his interviews that the majority of pupils are White and are, like himself, atheist or agnostic, although he has no evidence for this. Where he noted that there was religious affiliation in the school, it was amongst White pupils who were associated with a local Baptist church, whilst acknowledging that there were ethnic Buddhists and Sikhs in the school along with some Muslims. He gave the impression that pupils were generally ambivalent about religion. Jacob did not indicate that he knew about the growing numbers of pupils from Eastern European and East Mediterranean countries in the school who attend the local Orthodox Church. Although he was aware that there is a small mosque and a gurdwara in the vicinity of the school, he was less sure about the mandirs or synagogues.

The school has a two-year Key Stage 3 and starts to focus on GCSE from the beginning of Year 9. This policy was under review as the new specifications for GCSE were being introduced and they had more content than the previous specifications. According to Jacob, the knowledge required by the examinations Board was simply at a level too sophisticated for Year 9 pupils, consequently Year 9 was being seen as a transition year as opposed to one where pupils start their GCSEs formally.

The school also has a mini-school system within the one school. Before Jacob arrived they were effectively four schools on one site but that had changed as a result of

inspection just as he arrived. Now there are four pastoral ‘schools’ but a common curriculum.

The school is an academy within a larger academy chain but the impact of being a part of the academy trust is ‘minimal’ in terms of the curriculum delivery. This was noted by Jacob in the initial interview:

So in term of, how many schools are there within the MAT altogether?

‘Within the Trust there are ... five or six secondary academies.’

When asked whether RE is common across all the academies within the Trust he responded:

‘... well not in all of them. There are three of us that have RE what is somewhat similar, in the sense that we have a ‘curriculumed’ programme which is RE and, or at least some degree RE and some degree combined...’

There is a heads of RE network, including the schools which deliver RE through an Humanities programme and they meet together on Tuesdays in a public house. There they moderate assessments, to ensure standards, but do not discuss curriculum as such.

Since joining the MAT there had been no change to the RE offer at the school at Key Stage 3. The Year 7 and 8 programme of study had not changed at all since Jacob’s second year at the school.

Table 15: Ethnicity in the ward where the school is situated

Ethnicity	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
White (all categories)	62.5	83.0
Mixed (all categories)	4.8	3.7
Asian (Indian sub-continent)	4.7	3.0

Asian (Chinese and other)	7.0	7.1
Black (all categories)	19.1	2.6
Other (all categories)	1.9	1.1

Table 16: Religion in the ward where the school is situated

Religion	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
Christianity	52.9	56.3
Buddhist	1.7	0.7
Hindu	3.6	2.2
Jewish	0.2	0.4
Muslim	6.8	3.0
Sikh	1.4	0.6
Other religion	0.4	0.7
No religion	25.5	30.2
Not stated	7.6	6.7

Table 17: Level of education for those 16 and over in the ward where the school is situated

Level of education – aged 16 and over	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
No qualifications	20.6	21.2
Level 1	12.0	13.2
Level 2	13.1	15.5
Level 3	10.7	10.6
Level 4 and above	33.2	30.1
Apprenticeship	1.9	2.7
Other	8.5	7.1

Table 18: Occupation in the ward where the school is situated

Occupation	Statistics for the local authority area	Area where the school is situated
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	by %	by %
Managers, directors and senior officials	10.9	13.5
Professional occupations	20.6	28.2
Associate professional and technical occupations	11.8	13.7
Administrative and secretarial occupations	8.6	9.7
Skilled trades occupations	5.6	10.5
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	12.8	4.2
Sales and customer service occupations	8.8	5.6
Process, plant and machine operatives	9.0	5.0
Elementary occupations	12.2	9.6

The school states:

‘The curriculum at all key stages is personalised to the needs, aptitudes, interests and abilities of students. All students have access to a curriculum that:

- Develops independent learning.
- Develops core skills in Literacy, Numeracy and ICT.
- Develops personal skills such as thinking skills, problem solving, initiative, empathy, communication and active participation.
- Develops knowledge through the core curriculum.

Our aim is to provide a rich and balanced educational environment, where all students can excel academically, vocationally, digitally, socially, morally, spiritually, physically, emotionally and environmentally.’

All subjects are seen to make a contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. As such each curriculum area has a document that outlines that contribution. This is further supported by the school's wellbeing programme.

Religious education, under the name Social and Religious Studies (SRS), is seen as making a specific contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development. Below are excerpts of the school's policy document highlighting the role of the SRS curriculum to SMSC:

Spiritual development:

The SRS curriculum is fundamentally focused on issues of spirituality, throughout KS3 pupils focus on the 6 major world religions in depth, enabling them to draw links and comparisons both within and between them. This is then further developed through thought provoking thematic units of work that intentionally combine a range of theistic and atheistic attitudes to explore a range of perspectives.

Moral development:

The SRS curriculum aims to encourage students to develop an understanding of the nature of a moral action, throughout KS3 and KS4 their conception of morality is challenged and questioned over a range of ethical issues such as abortion, euthanasia and the death penalty.

Social development:

Throughout the wellbeing curriculum pupils are challenged to engage in a range of major social issues, both within and out of the classroom through assemblies and events. These activities further enrich pupils ability to interact with each other and function in a social environment. The curriculum starts off with a resource aimed at building relationships and bonds within year 7 form groups and builds to create a cohesive relationship and identity as a result of shared mutual experience and respect.

Cultural development:

Pupils are encouraged to experience a range of diverse cultural opportunities through the SRS curriculum. With each of the 6 major world religions placed into the appropriate cultural context and connecting with current affairs and events. We run excursions to local places of worship to provide students with the opportunity to immerse themselves in the cultural variety that exists on their doorstep.

It is within this context that RE is delivered, although the assertion that the school ran ‘excursions to local places of worship’ was met with some surprise by Jacob, who stated that this did not happen.

Religious education in the school

Religious Education is determined by the school’s funding agreement as a non-denominational converter academy, previously being a County school. Social and Religious Studies has 100 minutes per curriculum week, every five days. This was usually split into two sessions in each week, but not always. As the school was not a religious foundation before the conversion, its RE must be: ‘in the main the teaching of Christianity with reference to the principal religions represented in Great Britain.’ The RE offer should resemble that of a locally agreed syllabus, according to the funding agreement. The school’s RE had not changed since it became an academy and it would be reasonable to hold that the school followed the locally agreed syllabus, especially as this was an issue that came up as a result of a Section 8 subject inspection. The locally agreed syllabus required the school to:

‘... extend their (*pupils*) understanding of Christianity and the other principal religions in a local, national and global context. They deepen their understanding of important beliefs, concepts and issues of truth and authority in religion.’

Following the National Framework for RE (NFRE) published in 2004 (QCA 2004).

The syllabus went on to require that pupils encounter statutory content for Christianity and the five major world religions identified in the syllabus. The content

was divided up for each religion into six areas, related to the assessment model in the NFRE (Op.Cit):

- beliefs, teachings and sources
- practices and ways of life
- forms and expressing meaning
- identity, diversity and belonging
- meaning, purpose and truth
- values and commitment.

When asked whether the programme of study was based on the locally agreed syllabus Jacob replied:

‘... to some extent, I mean the idea that it’s the six major world religions ... so ... yes to some extent but not entirely as prescriptively, but when we were looking at the initial review post HMI, ensuring the content we were delivering within what is required for each religion ... the South River Agreed Syllabus was an important part of that.’

Table 19 sets out the curriculum offer in RE that resulted from the HMI inspection as developed by Jacob, with the support of his colleagues.

Table 19: Programme of Study for KS3 Social and Religious Studies

	Year 7	Year 8
HT1	Judaism An introduction to the study of religions considering a variety of beliefs and practices within Judaism, including the stories of Abraham and Moses, the importance of the Torah and Synagogue.	Hinduism Pupils consider the origins of the Hindu faith and the concept of God before developing their knowledge and understanding of aspects of beliefs and practices, including sacred texts, public and private worship and pilgrimage.
HT2	Christianity	Meaning of Life

	Pupils consider a diverse range of views within modern Christianity, including the Bible, public and private worship and questions around the divinity of Jesus.	In this thematic unit pupils consider a variety of views regarding the creation of the universe from both theistic and atheistic perspectives.
HT3	Islam Pupils consider a range of information about beliefs and practices within Islamic traditions including key figures, 5 pillars, the Qur'an and Mosques.	Buddhism Pupils consider the origins of the Buddhist faith and the story of the Buddha, before developing their knowledge and understanding of key teachings and Buddhist philosophy.
HT4	Stages of Life In this thematic unit pupils combine their knowledge of religions in order to compare different approaches to the celebration of key rites of passage within different traditions.	Sikhism Pupils consider a range of information about beliefs and practices within Sikh traditions. From this they develop an understanding of the impact that following Sikh tradition would have on Sikhs living in the UK.
HT5	Constitution & Political Systems Pupils focus on the concept of democracy and democratic systems within the UK considering a range of different actors within the political system.	Criminal Justice System Pupils focus on the criminal justice system in the UK. Considering types of crime/punishment, aims of sentencing and a variety of religious responses.
HT6	Electoral Systems & Political Parties Pupils build on their learning from the last unit of work and consider the importance of elections within a democratic system.	Tolerance & Understanding In this thematic unit pupils consider a variety of issues regarding responses to diversity in the UK from a range of both theistic and atheistic perspectives.

It is useful to have a comparison of the expectation of the locally agreed syllabus and what the school delivers. The requirement for Buddhism was a useful comparison to make. The syllabus required the teaching of the following:

Table 20: content for Buddhism to be covered at KS3

Enlightenment The Dhammapada The Three Jewels – Buddha – Dharma – Sangha	Symbolism of the Lotus 5 Moral Concepts Noble Eightfold Path	Family devotion/public worship – Buddha Rupa – Buddha Shrine – Meditation Buddhist practices and way of life
The Buddhist Community – Mahayana – Theravada – Tibetan Buddhism (Vajrayana Buddhism) Cultural Influences	The Four Noble Truths Birth, death and rebirth The Dalai Lama	The laity The Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara

When compared to the school’s curriculum offer in HT3 of Year 8 the agreed syllabus requires more of teachers when teaching Buddhism. The syllabus expects pupils to have knowledge of the life of the Buddha before the end of KS2, however the school’s programme does not acknowledge or build on that. Jacob noted, the syllabus was consulted but not followed, it informed but it did not influence the specifics of what was taught. The key document for the programme of study was the Section 8 inspection by HMI. This in many ways is the foundational document that Jacob goes back to. It stated that when reviewing KS3 it should:

‘... ensure its content, breadth and balance align more closely with the expectations in the locally agreed syllabus’

because:

‘... the selection of topics and the distribution of the modules do not secure a coherent, balanced and progressive curriculum. Insufficient time is allocated to the study of Christianity; some of the units lack a clear subject focus.’

According to Jacob, the Humanities team responded by writing a programme of study that drew upon those with specialist knowledge in each religion. The first attempt at this was too difficult to deliver meaningfully so they then rewrote the programme, which is still in place.

The inspection noted that there was insufficient time given to the teaching of Christianity but the revised programme of study only gives the same amount of time to Christianity as it does to the other religious traditions. Jacob offers a reason for this based in his commitment to RE being broad and balanced, note his comments about his A Level choices:

‘... we have always sought to have, particularly at KS3, a curriculum that is very specifically for all ... it is interesting because we have so much desire to be broad and balanced that one of our challenges has always been the increased Christianity content. So the desire [is] from the external and us kind of going “well do we want to teach ... if we want to teach, if we’re teaching 50% Christianity does that? ... to what extent does that limit the breadth that we want to have?”’

The solution to this is to use the themed units with Christianity as a point of comparison rather than doing any in depth study of Christianity over time – which only appears in one half term in Year 7. Similarly, the inspection report notes the lack of coherence in the curriculum offer for RE and the programme of study does not address that issue. As there were no follow up inspections to HMI subject focussed inspections, there was no way of checking the department’s interpretation of the failings of the school and its remedy with the inspector who had made those judgements.

For Jacob, though, the HMI inspection was foundational as it happened during his first year in the school when he was an NQT. When asked: ... do you think the HMI inspection was an important catalyst for change? He responded:

‘Absolutely, absolutely. Obviously, I was, like, an NQT back in the day but I remember it well.’

It was put on a par with remembering the birth of a first child.

Seeing the impact of inspection on RE, he was in favour of subject inspections to ensure that pupils received their entitlement and he saw Ofsted’s lack of subject inspection as a failure. He did not reflect upon what that might mean for the programme of study they currently had and he held that any national entitlement that came as a result of the CoRE (2018) report would look like what the school was already doing.

The experience of the impact of inspection from the formative position of an NQT was evident in Jacob’s narrative, and there was a clear commitment not to change the programme of study at KS3 even though there were pressures to do so. One of those pressures was the new GCSE RS specification. Jacob mentioned GCSE twenty-one times altogether during the interviews but its main influence was on how RE was assessed, not the curriculum content. This was causing Jacob, as the curriculum lead, to re-think some of what they were teaching. Nevertheless he was committed not to providing a narrower curriculum offer in RE:

‘I mean primarily we wanted to ensure that pupils had a broad and balanced understanding of the six major world religions before starting the GCSE course. For the key stage 3 we thought that was like ... primarily fundamental.’

When asked why he felt it was important to learn about six world religions, he employed a deficit model. He recognised that the area of the school was not diverse and that many pupils were from working class backgrounds. The predominance of Christianity in the area meant that pupils needed to know about ‘the other’.

The concept that RE should be a form of comparative religious studies was significant for Jacob. He worked with a model that posits the reality of religion, which then is exhibited in different forms:

‘ ... so it is looking at the context of that faith and how it has been brought about, the key figures in the first instance and then working through the kind of background traditions, the impacts that certain beliefs have on individual believers, ah – you know, holy books, sources of authority, the place of worship, those kinds of things, and within that there will be some comparison points ...’

The programme of study is predicated on a specific view of the nature of religion and the relationship between religions through historic progression. The Abrahamic religions come in Year 7 because, according to Jacob’s reasoning, they will be more familiar to Year 7 pupils. Hence it is easier to link to previous learning. Nevertheless, there is a clear concept that Judaism is the background for Christianity and Islam has them both as a background. This occurs in Year 8 in relation to the Dharmic religious traditions. This approach is reminiscent of Smart (1958) and the approaches to RE as it developed in the 1970s and 1980s. Curriculum coherence is rooted in a concept of the phenomenology of religion in its imagined historic iterations. This position, held by Jacob and his team, underpins the RE programme of study at KS3.

Discussion

After the first year post-HMI inspection the curriculum is fixed and in the five years up to the research it had not changed at all. Although an NQT at the time Jacob quickly assumed responsibility for the RE curriculum and he held the belief that ‘his’ curriculum pattern reflects what a national entitlement at KS3 would look like.

Jacob’s key narrative about RE planning has two main themes. Firstly, the impact of the Ofsted inspection led by an HMI, which re-sets RE in the school in terms of the teaching of religions. The HMI report is something that Jacob comes back to and is a foundational text in what happens next. Secondly, that no one religion should have more curriculum time than any other. Jacob did not see why Christianity should have more time per se than any other religious tradition. Hence, there was the same amount

of time given to the teaching of all religions as discrete traditions. His assertion that in the themed topics Christianity is used as a point of comparison cannot be tested, as there was no formal place for Christianity in the curriculum plan or the direction to teachers.

The sense of broad and balanced, and the non-privileging of Christianity, has roots in Jacob's personal history. As a young person, he was socialised in a relatively non-religious context, even those who were 'religious' shared his general cultural position that everything should be questioned. Hence, there was no attachment to Christianity per se and likewise he had no real memory of RE from his own schooling to draw upon as a model for the curriculum he had developed. When discussing his A Level choices, he referred to the concept of 'broad and balanced' and these values became important in his curriculum narrative. Intertwined within this narrative was also his belief in his own neutrality, made possible because of his lack of religious identification or affiliation. The concepts of broad and balanced also have an impact on his view of the influence that GCSE reforms should have on KS3 RE. He was clearly of the opinion that pupils need a broad and balanced understanding of religions as a whole, the big six, before narrowing down for GCSE where they study the biggest two. He held that the school is resisting the path that other schools have taken, even within the MAT, that RE at KS3 is about ensuring pupils did well at GCSE, the measure against which the departments are being judged. The good examination result the department produces is a vindication of Jacob's point of view in his eyes. GCSE's influence on RE is in the way assessments are made of pupils' work.

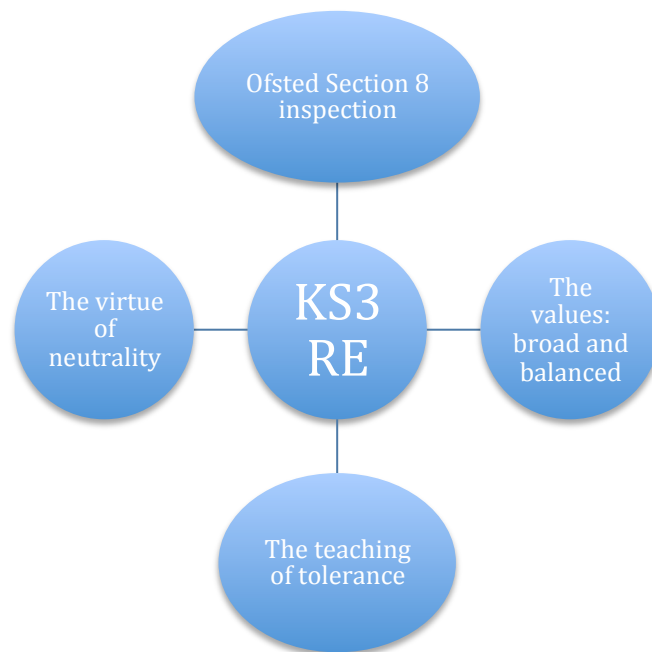
Of the non-religious units of work, only one has any specific reference to religion, that in Year 7 HT4, the rest are directly related to Citizenship education. Whilst Jacob saw himself as an RE teacher, his main concern, and the reason he became a teacher, was the development of citizens. Preparing pupils to live in multi religious society and to help them be better citizens was key to his vision for RE. Interestingly, though, he believes that he is preparing pupils not only to live in modern Britain as an abstract concept but also in their locality, where they will meet people of difference. The key virtue that Jacob desired to instil in his pupils was tolerance. There was no evidence, though, that he had any clear idea or specific knowledge of religions locally, and

whilst the locally agreed syllabus was consulted in the development of the current curriculum plan, there was no evidence that it had any specific bearing on the curriculum itself.

Within the school, there was no curriculum oversight of RE by anyone other than Jacob. This clearly led to a situation where there was a school vision of what RE was doing to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and what RE was actually doing, and these were at odds. The statement by the school that as part of RE pupils visited local places of worship was clearly not the case and was greeted with some disbelief by Jacob. Jacob could not work out who had put the statement about visits to places of worship in a public facing document and was not aware that he had been consulted about it.

Jacob's planning of RE also represents his view on the nature of religion. Ideally Hinduism would have been the first religion to be taught, as he believed it was the oldest; but he leads with Judaism and then Christianity followed by Islam in Year 7 because it allowed for a better transition from Year 6 to Year 7. Nevertheless, there was a naïve concept of the history of religions (see Doniger 2009; Solomon 2000) in the curriculum plan leading to a view of religion propagated from the 18th century, which still has an influence today especially in RE resources. Figure 3 shows the influences that contextualise Jacob's curriculum decision-making in Year 8.

Figure 3 influences on Jacob’s curriculum decisions – showing differential level of influence



Conclusion

Jacob’s view of RE was shaped initially by Ofsted and the Section 8 subject inspection led by HMI. The school’s response to this was not challenged, as the HMI subject inspection programme was withdrawn in 2013 and Section 5 inspections did not have a subject specific focus. At no point from that inspection had there been use of an external consultant who could make comment on the school’s curriculum plan, even though Jacob knew the local authority RE adviser and himself was a member of the local authority SACRE. His overall sense of what was right for his pupils was based in his conviction that pupils had a right to a certain type of curriculum to enable to them to live as good citizens in their context. As Jacob purposely did not live in the school’s catchment area, he had very little actual knowledge of what that meant, and this led to a curriculum that replicates a decontextualized view of the religious traditions and issues that pupils will learn about. This in some ways was bolstered by his belief that he had the ability, as a neutral, and outsider, to represent people of faith and belief as they would present themselves, although he had a clear epistemic gap at two levels, that of the ‘idealised’ believer and that of the ‘localised’ believer. This he did not seem to be a problem to him.

Chapter 5: Case Studies Schools with a religious foundation

In this chapter, I present the two case studies for the denominational schools in this study. The case studies follow the set pattern, of those presented in Chapter 4.

The schools are presented in the alphabetic order of their anonymised names.

Bishop Benson C of E School

Introduction

Bishop Benson School is situated on the border of Metropolis and Shire County. It draws its pupils from the local Metropolis borough in which it is situated and its adjoining county. It is a converter academy and part of an Anglican educational trust. In terms of attainment, the school is judged average at KS4 and 6th Form. The school has just over 1,000 pupils on roll. In 2016 Ofsted judged the school to be Good, continuing to be Good from its previous inspection. A Section 48 Inspection under the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) framework followed in 2017 and the school's RE was judged 'Outstanding'. At the time of the research, the curriculum lead for RE was Kevin, since that time he has moved into senior management and a new curriculum lead has taken his place. Kevin constructed the programme of study that is the focus of this case study.

Kevin

Kevin was born in the UK but moved to the Republic of Ireland at the age of 6. He and his family were engaged with the local Roman Catholic Parish church when he was a child. He had no clear memory of RE at primary school but he did remember his involvement with the local parish church, where he regularly served Mass.

Kevin went to a secondary school run by a religious order in Baile Átha Cliath and went on to read Theology and Biblical Studies at Coláiste Tríonóide Naofa, Baile Átha Cliath. He remembers RE at school and found it uninspiring:

'RE to be honest with you was crap, it was badly taught, at the time, the best lesson was one guy, I can't quite remember it, I think maybe learning about other religions

but it was just good detailed knowledge ... half the time whiffly whaffly or just a regurgitated of the catechism or something like that ... the RE teacher and the priests weren't up to much.'

His inspiration came primarily from his own faith engagement and experience:

'There was a retreat organised [by a group] running sort of missions in Ireland at the time. I went on one of their first retreats and it was very much a Catholic programme ... it came from the States, very evangelical, very conservative ... but actually they set it up in a very ecumenical way because there was all sorts of Free Church Evangelicals and maybe one Catholic there, so it automatically gave me a very sort of a broad ... there was my first deep experience ...'

This deep experience and experience of the retreat movement led to a number of developments. He led a Bible Study in his school and also had involvement in building bridges with non-Catholic Christians in Northern Ireland and supporting the work in the former Czechoslovakia. These events had a great impact on Kevin:

'So it was when sort of Christianity became really real, it was sort of that community experience of love at that point, that it was at that weekend that I became aware of God, in a deeper sense, sort of all parts of it clicked into place really, so I'd been serving mass for years, been on and off I suppose ... [in] reality spiritual faith was there but that's when it became sort of real in a community sense.'

Significantly this experience was ecumenical and not narrowly Roman Catholic:

'... so it was very much like Christianity is the label not Catholic, which you often get in England lots of Catholics refer to themselves as Catholics, no hang on we're all Christian here so it was very much a real understanding that God works through everyone and Christianity we are all of the same fold underneath.'

That involvement carried on both at school and in the local community, where Kevin ran two Bible Study groups at school and a youth group in his community. It was not Kevin's intention to become a teacher. The nuns in his local parish had a connection

with a community of Gilbertine friars in Baile Átha Cliath and they introduced him to them. As a result at the age of 18 Kevin went through a period of exploring whether to remain lay or to enter the Roman Catholic priesthood, whether a diocesan priest or as a religious:

‘at the time I was thinking ... well I might go off on missions as a lay person or join the Gilbertines or become diocesan priest at some point anyway’

This period of thinking led Kevin to apply to read Theology and Biblical Studies at Coláiste Tríonóide Naofa, Baile Átha Cliath. As this was a distinctly Protestant institution this choice at first seemed strange for someone so rooted in the Roman Catholic Church, especially as at one time there was a threat of excommunication on those Catholics entering Coláiste Tríonóide Naofa. Kevin states:

‘I loved Coláiste Tríonóide Naofa. I loved the look of it, the ambience, the feel, the cobbled stones, I just like that aesthetic sort of beauty of the place but I loved their old library and the Leabhar Cheanannais there, it had a rich history which is always ... I don’t like the red brick and that ... I like the history and the beauty of the old so that’s why I did that...’

This choice is further explained by his belief that if he were to go into the priesthood he would go to a Roman Catholic higher education institution anyway. The choice, though, is already underpinned by his experience of the cross-denominational retreat movement and his belief that primarily he was part of a Christian tradition situated in a broader Christian tradition that God works through. It is also rooted in his own identity, as reflecting on his choice he refers to his own childhood experience and other people’s perceptions, especially that as he was born in England he must be Protestant. His lived experience and theological commitment appeared to have underpinned his choice of higher education institute and the fact that he ended up teaching in an Anglican school as head of RE, as well as being a SIAMS inspector.

His experience at Coláiste Tríonóide Naofa was essentially ecumenical, something that validated his own experience as a teenager:

‘In Coláiste Tríonóide Naofa as well the guys the Séipéal na hÉireann had all their seminarians doing Biblical Studies with us and then I got to know quite a few of those, we went so I’d go to their ordinations over time, went out to a couple of lectures that they had in their Séipéal na hÉireann college and I think I was the only Catholic in their ordinations.’

After graduation, Kevin went to live in a Gilbertine community in Metropolis and did some work as a Teaching Assistant in a primary school, which he did not enjoy. After the year he was still undecided as to whether to apply to a diocese to train to be a priest or to join the Gilbertines. As a result he returned to Ireland, and specifically Coláiste Tríonóide Naofa, to train to be a secondary teacher. During this time he saw teaching as something useful but not essential, it bought him time to reflect:

‘[I was thinking] I don’t mind teaching it’s not my thing cos I was still again toying with the priesthood, becoming a Gilbertine friar and then it was after that when, you know, it comes to looking for jobs there wasn’t a whole lot going on in Ireland at the time so I applied to England there was a position at a Gilbertine school.’

He taught at the school and also worked in chaplaincy, but Kevin’s life direction changed when a woman that he had known for sometime, through his involvement in the Catholic retreat movement, asked him to marry her. He agreed to the proposal. Kevin took up a teaching post in a non-denominational school near to his wife’s family and was head of department. The school, though, became an Anglican maintained school and there was some question as to whether he, as a Roman Catholic, could carry on in his position. It was decided that he could, as both the Roman Catholic Church in England and the Church of England were both part of Churches Together in England. The school though was to transform again. Kevin reflects:

‘I stayed there but then unfortunately that school was sort of the Church of England was pushed out of it in that sense ... I would say so ... it became given to another Trust and when you put your heart and soul into it you know with chaplain there and myself we sort of carried the Christian ethos of the school and it was a real mission.

As a result of working in the school, Kevin became involved with the Anglican diocese and became a SIAMS inspector. It was at that point that he moved to Bishop Benson C of E School.

Kevin, his wife and children remain committed Catholics and he retains a link to an Order of Friars, where they go to Mass and where his children have the role of servers. He did, though, go to Anglican communion in his school as he wished to model Christian living within a community – which for him the school formed. Historically, though, he also received Anglican communion in Baile Átha Cliath, during the ordinations of his fellow students for the Séipéal na hÉireann. This openness to, and familiarity with, other Christian traditions meant that he could move between different contexts without feeling conflict.

The school

The school is a Church of England Academy Trust, with other schools, and was formally a voluntary aided maintained school. It has just over 1,000 pupils on role. The tables below give an indication of the population of the area where the school is situated, against the data for the whole local authority. Ethnicity, Religion, Education and Population have been highlighted to judge the expected diversity of the area and how the school itself reflects that diversity against these four key metrics. It is recognised that schools do not necessarily reflect the area in which they are situated (Reay, Crozier and James 2011; Reay 2018).

Table 21: Ethnicity in the ward where the school is situated

Ethnicity	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
White (all categories)	84	87
Mixed (all categories)	4	3
Asian (Indian sub-continent)	5	5
Asian (Chinese and other)	2	3
Black (all categories)	6	4
Other (all categories)	1	0

Table 22: Religion in the ward where the school is situated

Religion	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
Christianity	60	61
Buddhist	1	0
Hindu	2	1
Jewish	0	0
Muslim	3	2
Sikh	0	0
Other religion	0	0
No religion	26	26
Not stated	8	7

Table 23: Level of education for those 16 and over in the ward where the school is situated

Level of education – aged 16 and over	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
No qualifications	18	20
Level 1	14	15
Level 2	16	17
Level 3	11	11
Level 4 and above	33	28
Apprenticeship	3	3
Other	5	5

Table 24: Occupation in the ward where the school is situated

Occupation	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
Managers, directors and senior officials	13	13

Professional occupations	21	18
Associate professional and technical occupations	16	15
Administrative and secretarial occupations	15	14
Skilled trades occupations	9	10
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	7	8
Sales and customer service occupations	6	7
Process, plant and machine operatives	4	4
Elementary occupations	6	7

In terms of diversity as a whole, the school is less diverse than secondary schools nationally. Only 2.9% of pupils do not have English as a first language compared to 16.1% nationally. Similarly, only 1.7% of students have a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or an education, health and care (HEC) plan. Significantly, though, the indicator for levels of poverty are marginally higher than the national average, where 29.4% of pupils have been eligible for free school meals (FSM) compared to 29.1% nationally.

More than half of all pupils at 16 were entered for the EBacc subjects, higher than expected when compared to the national picture for state schools (55% compared to 38.2%) and 20% gained a grade 5/C¹⁵ or above, which is in line with the national average.

Religious education in the school

The school has a curriculum statement on its website relating to RE. It states:

¹⁵ 5/C: the 5 refers to the reformed GCSE grading system, the equivalence of 5 with Grade C under the previous system was made by the school. The equivalence is not exact, see: <https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2018/03/02/gcse-9-to-1-grades-a-brief-guide-for-parents/>

‘RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (key stage 3, key stage 4 and 6th form)

Through religious education, students receive guidance on:

- the meaning and purpose of life;
- beliefs about God, the self and the nature of reality;
- issues of right and wrong;
- what it means to be human.

The study of religious education:

- develops students’ knowledge and understanding;
- offers opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual development;
- enhances awareness and understanding of all faiths by encouraging students to learn from other religious traditions while they are learning about them.

Students’ skills to consider, interpret, analyse and evaluate are fostered, so that they can flourish within a pluralistic society as sensitive, informed young people.’

In addition, it states that teaching and learning supports the school’s core values and ethos as a Christian school committed to truth, justice, respect for all and care of the environment.

Students spend 70% of the time studying units with a Christian focus. Sikhism and Islam are studied as discrete faiths. Judaism and Hinduism are referred to within other units.

There is no detailed curriculum programme of study for RE on the website.

Key Stage 3 consists of Years 7 and 8.

Of RE the SIAMS inspection report (2017) states:

‘RE plays a central role in the academy’s life and work. This is expressed by adequate curriculum time being provided as part of a broad and balanced curriculum offer.

There are also good specialist staffing ratios. The curriculum is well balanced

between content focusing on Christianity and that which addresses a range of other world faiths and non-religious life-stances.’

and

‘The team of RE specialists are trained in an approach called Philosophy for Children (P4C¹⁶) ... The skilled RE team work in a collegiate way which enhances the effectiveness of the department. Planning is detailed and rigorous and opportunities are taken to ensure that marking and assessment are consistent across the department.’

The school was awarded the RE Quality Mark, achieving the Gold Standard.

Clearly, it was the case that RE is central to the identity of the school, but it was also clear from Kevin that it was not the role of RE to be the ‘soul’ of the school.

‘... it’s not just the role of RE to form [pupils] it’s with the whole setting, like this morning I was doing collective worship on St Patrick and that would be very different from an RE lesson, so it’s the whole it needs I think for it to be holistic and complete; it needs to come in the whole setting of a school so you would have you know you get sometimes, ... Maths teachers more overtly share their faith than an RE teacher would so it’s with the whole setting.’

For Kevin there was one overriding theme:

‘I agree with them its needs to be academically rigorous at the expense of not being spiritually rich as it could be, but so be it.’

There was a prioritisation of the academic and this came out in Kevin’s narrative about the curriculum offer. When asked further about the role of RE in a school with a religious foundation it was clear that there is a tension:

¹⁶ P4C is a programme that promotes Philosophy for Children; see: <https://p4c.com>

‘It’s a weird one, it’s like I do think RE is not necessarily part of their spiritual development but it can be. But the cross over is this, where you get this intellectual development ... when they really start to question ...’

When asked how he would know that RE had been successful, Kevin answered:

‘The grade, to be honest in that sense in one objective quantifiable measure would be their grade ... they need to be intellectual...’

The importance of intellectual development for Kevin was the reason that Philosophy for Children (P4C) was a dominant feature of RE, with one lesson out of three across a ten day period, as can be seen from the curriculum plan, below:

Table 25: RE curriculum plan for Years 7 and 8

Yr	Term	Term	Term	Term	Term	Term	Term
	1 2 weeks	1 5 weeks	2 7 weeks	3 6 weeks	4 6 weeks	5 5 weeks	6 3 weeks
7	Prior to setting- Intro- duction to RE & Spirit- uality	Identity Split lessons or 1 in 3 – to be display	Narnia and Christian beliefs Split lessons or 1 in 3 lessons is	Moses and the Dec- alogue <i>Judaism</i> Split lessons or 1 in 3 lessons is	The world’s religions: beliefs and practices <i>Buddhism & Hinduism</i> Baseline Assessme nt Split lessons or 1 in 3 lessons is	The world’s religions: beliefs and practices <i>Christ- ianity & Islam</i> Term 5 Assessme nt Split lessons or 1 in 3 lessons is	The world’s religions: beliefs and practices <i>Sikhism</i>

		lessons until P4C training	P4C	P4C	P4C	P4C	
	6 (b) 3 weeks	1 7 weeks	2 7 weeks	3 6 weeks	4 6 weeks	5 5 weeks	6 (a) 3 weeks
8	World religions: Festivals Guided project	Critical RE Split lessons – 1 in 3 P4C Assessment sample paper questions- for 3.2.1.3 page 4 1,2,4,5, & 12 marks	Jesus the Rebel Split lessons – 1 in 3 P4C	Inspirational people- key people of world religions. Split lessons – 1 in 3 P4C	Understanding Christianity: core concepts Split lessons – 1 in 3 P4C	Morality- Main Ethical theories Split lessons – 1 in 3 P4C	World religions: Places of worship Split lessons – 1 in 3 P4C

The structure of the plan is based on a seven ‘term’ structure of varying weeks. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, in partnership with other schools, Year 7 starts at the end of Year 6 and the beginning of Year 9, in the second half of the summer of Year 8 – formally the end of Key Stage 3.

Kevin, as the curriculum lead, was responsible for the curriculum plan above. When asked how it came about he stated:

‘You get a mix of some inherited stuff cos its one of those strange ... this is the Outer Borough agreed syllabus which wasn’t seemingly adopted there, you’ve got the [diocesan] Dickens syllabus which is more geared towards primary schools, the secondary school is a mix in some ways. Because its an academy as well there’s even more autonomy for the heads of RE to [do] their own thing...’

A number of themes arise from this narrative about when he arrived:

- the inherited – which are being modified with experience of the team
- the local agreed syllabus
- the diocesan syllabus

he also adds at various points

- the Church of England’s resource *Understanding Christianity*

Kevin is disappointed with *Understanding Christianity* as he was led to believe that it would be a complete resource for Church of England schools with a programme of study and lesson plans, which it was not.

He expressed the belief that if a school was following the locally agreed syllabus then they would be meeting the requirements of the diocesan syllabus – but there is no diocesan syllabus for the secondary phase. This is not unusual as Anglican diocesan boards of education can require their schools to follow the locally agreed syllabus, given that Committee B of every Agreed Syllabus Conference in England is the Church of England’s appointed representative. Some diocesan boards of education also produce a supplement to enhance the Agreed Syllabus so that Anglican schools can have a specific Anglican focus.

The locally agreed syllabus had a suggested curriculum plan for KS3:

Table 26: Curriculum Plan suggested by the locally agreed syllabus

	Autumn		Spring		Summer	
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Year 7	Religious leadership	Tribes	Christianity		Sikhism	
Year 8	Spirituality		Islam		Reincarnation in Hinduism	Religion and Science
Year 9	Remembering	Judaism	Buddhism		Wealth and Poverty	

It is clear that there are resonances of this plan in Kevin's programme, but given the amount of time the school has given to RE and the needs of pupils in a plural world, he had developed themed approaches to religions other than Christianity; in Year 7 focussing on beliefs and practices with two themed units and in Year 8, one unit places of worship and one on festivals.

Kevin had a dual narrative about why his programme of study differed from that of the locally agreed syllabus, which was approved by the diocese for use. One was the Church of England's resource Understanding Christianity, and the other was around the autonomy that comes with being an academy. In the interview focusing on the curriculum, Kevin referred to autonomy on eight occasions and two themes emerged:

'Because its an academy as well there's even more autonomy for the heads of RE to do their own thing ...'

and

'... there's a lack of national directive and more autonomy within the schools...'

As the interview progressed the theme of autonomy developed. Initially it is to do with being in an academy, then it moved to being about teacher autonomy to do what pupils enjoyed, but significantly there was a sense that the lack of national direction leaves teachers in a position where they need to exercise autonomy. The one thing that interrupted that narrative was reference to Understanding Christianity, which Kevin mentioned thirteen times in the interview. Finally, he revisited the idea that teachers can teach what is their ‘favourite’, and took that further stating that what they do with the programme of study in their own classrooms ‘is up to them’. Hence, autonomy here worked on two levels, that of the school in relation to the curriculum and that of the teacher in relation to their classroom.

Understanding Christianity¹⁷ is a project of the Church of England’s Education Office and was developed in response to a report conducted on RE in Church of England Schools commissioned by the National Society (2014). As noted, Kevin was under the impression that the resource would provide a scheme of work but he was disappointed:

‘I had hoped with Understanding Christianity that this was going to be the answer but it’s not because it still means hours of work of people saying yes it’s brilliant, what’s there ... but it’s all over the place ...’

This sense of disappointment had led Kevin and his team back to a place where they were left to construct their own curriculum from a resource that appeared to promise more.

Another major theme that arose when talking about Key Stage 3 is GCSE, which Kevin referred to thirty times; part of which is concern that GCSE is dominating the whole of the secondary curriculum:

¹⁷ See: <http://www.understandingchristianity.org.uk>

‘... I made the conscious decision that we wouldn’t [focus KS3 on preparing solely for KS4] because some schools were going down into basically [Years] 7 and 8 becoming a 5 year GCSE ... I didn’t want to do that’

Although GCSE did have a direct impact on assessment,

‘When we had to do away with the levels we replaced them with ... very similar to the GCSE language ... and we mark that as if it was a 15 mark Exam-Board evaluation question. So the thread is there in terms of the assessment and the assessment language is very similar to the GCSE.’

There is a contradiction in some ways here, in that the 2013 review of the agreed syllabus, which the school had in some ways committed to deliver, kept levels of attainment, although they were removed from National Curriculum Subject Orders in 2010 by the DfE.

In the context of teaching non-Christian religions Kevin referred to ‘world religions’ nineteen times, partly out of concern that at GCSE only Christianity and Islam were taught. The delivery of them, though, in Year 8 is themed:

‘Because we are finding it a little difficult to cram everything in, as it were, of the world religions ... so we’d look at rather than ... that we look at festivals of all the world religions and try and bring it in that way. That comes back from year 7 then with more focus on the world religions, looking at Moses’ Decalogue and sort to going back more historical.’

What was significant here, was the sense that RE is broader than the accountability measure in terms of entitlement but the department still had to prepare pupils for public examinations, the GCSE marking system being adapted for the non-examinable part of the curriculum.

The curriculum offer, though, had no overall narrative or coherence:

‘In terms of threads through it, it would be RE. If you were to say what’s the thread all of them there probably isn’t a coherent thing ...’

As the curriculum focussed interview progressed, the role of resources became increasingly important. As well as Understanding Christianity, Kevin mentioned others. Before Kevin arrived at the school, it had submitted a bid to a charitable trust that supports RE in schools. As a result it obtained copies of CS Lewis’s work that became the basis for the Narnia module in Year 7. This unit was retained because the resources were available and, in the end, it fitted in well with Understanding Christianity, although where it fitted into the long-term plan was not obvious. On seven occasions Kevin talked about ‘Critical RE’, a project run out of Bishop Otter College Metropolis, itself an Anglican institution, in relation to what was delivered in the P4C lessons. P4C is also a resource in its own right, although Kevin feels that it needed adapting to RE. The latter is also seen as adding a dimension for RE:

‘And the reason I love P4C, one of the reasons is that empathy where they are sitting in that circle listening to other ...’

When asked about the relationship of the P4C to the rest of the RE curriculum Kevin replied:

They stand alone ... the themes ... they would overlap ... the stimulus would be there but as you know from P4C the question might go off on another way.’

In part this was because Kevin was trying to deliver a skill set with a specific focus on some skills over others. Key for him were the skills needed for GCSE but others came to the fore:

‘I want to do what’s best for the kids and particularly to give them that wide skill set so the evaluative skills, that critical investigation, they need those skills ...’

Whilst there was a desire for a broad skill set not all skills were assessed:

‘The only skills that we sort of measure would be the academic ones ...’

This desire for skills for the future was met with a desire for knowledge that they might otherwise miss out on. This explains why the penultimate term in Year 8 had a focus on moral theories – something they would not now come across unless they did A Level RS:

‘[Referring to Year 8 specifically.] So what in some ways this is like lets put in key information that will be really good for them so the ethical theory. Although it flows some of the stuff they aren’t going to use Kant again until A level. You know, so it’s to give it a solid grounding.’

The Key Stage 3 programme of study was clearly in flux and a number of other influences come into play:

- the team – led by an incoming head of RE
- pupils
- parents

As Kevin was in the SLT and a SIAMS inspector curriculum oversight from him was presumed, in that there was no doubt of his ability given how well qualified he is and his position in the school. Pupil voice and parental voice, whilst there, had a very specific place in Kevin’s view of the curriculum. In one part of the interview he explored his view of the relationship between different ‘voices’ with a claim on curriculum. Of these voices, teachers were the most important, followed by pupils and finally parents.

‘Pupil voice is important, parent voice is important, *but I’m not saying that all basically all stake holders have a say but not necessarily the highest stakes* [my emphasis] Teachers are important voice as well ... the Church of England’s Understanding Christianity is a big voice’

In the end, for Kevin, only teachers could be the determiners of the curriculum in RE.

Discussion

There are a number of interesting tensions that arose from Kevin's narrative. Teaching RE was never his first choice, rather a back-up if he was not going to be a priest or a religious. His own experience of RE growing up was poor and he puts himself in opposition to RE as provided by his own secondary school by organising Bible study groups in school. He was deeply involved in the Retreat movement where experience and spirituality was core, something that he distanced RE from in a denominational school. He recognised the tensions himself. In terms of his own faith background and that of the school, he saw no specific tension. This came out strongly in his narrative about his time in the ecumenical Retreat movement and his time at Coláiste Tríonóide Naofa, Baile Átha Cliath. He retained his Roman Catholic identity but there was no sense that RE was inflected with a Roman Catholic perspective. Rather the resources he primarily drew upon are Anglican: CS Lewis, Critical RE and Understanding Christianity.

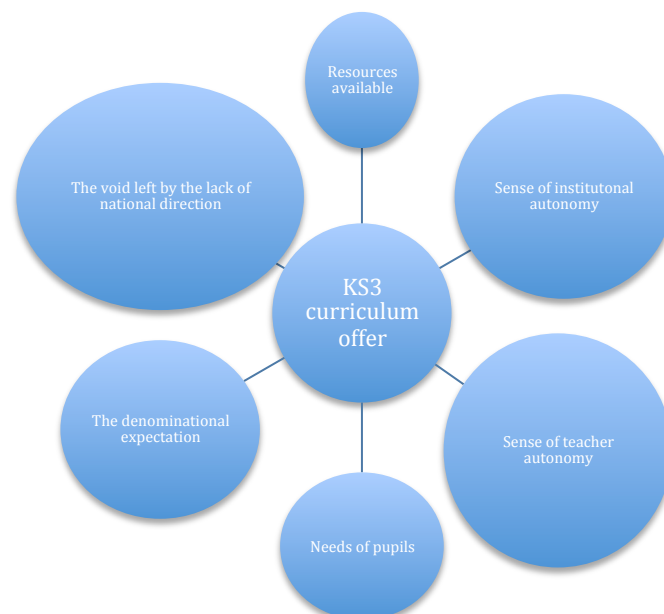
In terms of the classroom experience, he enjoyed the academic challenge, hence introducing Kant to Year 8, but the skills he tried to develop in pupils were not dependent upon a curriculum offer that was coherent in terms of content. Rather, there was a sense of tessellation based on the resources available to the school. There was no clear sense that SIAMS itself played any great role in deciding what should be taught, although it had validated what the school was doing, and whilst the locally agreed syllabus was mentioned, it was difficult to establish any clear relationship between what the school offered and the syllabus. There was a narrative deeply rooted in the autonomy of the school and the autonomy of the teacher. It appeared that these are the two poles between which the curriculum had been created. Within that autonomy, there was also a sense of what pupils needed as a basis for their future – both immediate and long term.

As a curriculum creator, Kevin's own academic background and his continued engagement with academic approaches to the RE curriculum, in the shape of Critical RE, were also influences, especially as the latter came with a resourcing framework. Understanding Christianity, which featured as a topic in Year 8, was a disappointment

as it did not come with a scheme of work. Kevin gave the impression that it was a game changer in terms of RE in his context (that of a Church of England school), but it is difficult to see how this worked in the curriculum, as there were only six weeks in Year 8 where the resource was used.

There was also a tension between GCSE and KS3, given that the latter was only two years and not three. KS3 supported GCSE in terms of skills to be developed and the assessment of KS3 but not content – although Understanding Christianity was seen to help. For Kevin, there was a need to ensure that there was some clear water between RE in KS3 and GCSE RS. Whilst parents sent their children to the school because it is denominational, they had no effective voice in what the school delivers in its RE. Therefore it is possible to identify six distinct but related influences on the planning of RE at KS3 in the school: autonomy of the school; teacher autonomy; needs of the pupils; resources available; denominational expectations; and, the lack of national direction. Figure 4 presents those influences showing which appear to be greater and those less so.

Figure 4: Influences on Kevin’s programme of study – showing the differential level of influence



Conclusion

As a voluntary aided Church of England school, its governing body had the right to specify the content of RE in terms of the school's founding document. In the narrative this was not alluded to at all, perhaps because the academy status of the school since 2012 has taken over that narrative. Other than in broad terms, though, the Trustees of the academy have not themselves imposed any curriculum on the RE department, most likely leaving it up to the professionals to decide. It is difficult to speculate but if the last two Section 48 inspections had not gone well the picture might be very different.

It was evident that Kevin did not want to interfere with the way the curriculum for RE was going, as the new head of RE was using a more collegial way forward, with the understanding that Kevin was still part of that college.

Kevin, too, seems to have in part embodied the separation between RE and the overall religious purpose of the school as he did not directly link his continued faith engagement with the RE that he delivers – although this did come out more in the Worship that he leads. His own experience of RE was not positive and therefore he did not come to the subject with a pre-set view of what would work, was good or desirable. What he did bring was his intellectual engagement and excitement to RE in the classroom, something that the curriculum plan is a means to achieving.

King Edward the Confessor School

Introduction

King Edward's is an all through Church of England Academy, although for the purposes of this case study only statistics for the secondary phase will be included, as will be the case for an analysis of the religious education provided by the school.

The number on role is 785 and the school is a mixed comprehensive but styles itself as a grammar school, without actually being one. The school was rated good at its last

Ofsted inspection in 2016 and was outstanding according to the school's Section 48 Inspection under the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) framework. At the time of the interview John was curriculum lead for RE, a member of the local SACRE and a SIAMS inspector but was moving further into the leadership team with another teacher set to replace him as the head of department.

John

John was born in Seacity, a northwest city to an Irish immigrant family and brought up as a Roman Catholic. In his own words he had an early attachment to his faith tradition:

'I suppose it starts at birth really so 1976, obviously I didn't know anything of the sort then, but within two weeks of my life I was Christened into the Roman Catholic ... all children within the family and everyone within the family were brought up as Roman Catholics.'

John recounts his earliest recollections of his engagement with religion:

'I suppose my first recollections of religion actually stem from my Communion and my preparation for my Communion because I still have my Communion book, where I was in a Catholic school and obviously a lot of our time, I was about 7, was spent preparing for our first Holy Communion and Confession, obviously before.'

This memory is regularly reinforced not by attending a Catholic church but by revisiting the experience of this moment in his life:

'I look back at the [Communion] book quite often actually, its one of my fondest childhood memorabilia as such ...'

Recalling his primary school religious education:

‘I look back now and I think certainly when I was in primary school I found out about God, Jesus etc., the very basics of Christianity and that was where my interest in religion started.’

But this interest was not uncritical:

‘I remember from being a primary school kid just asking the “why?” questions and “this doesn’t quite make sense to me” and you need to tell me ...’

In his last year of primary school John’s family moved to East Midtown for employment and his primary connection there was the local Roman Catholic parish:

‘... [and] my parents moved down south to East Midtown to the midlands as an 11 year old and again I was put straight into a Catholic school and one of the first things my mother went to do as a good Catholic Irish tradition was introduce us all to the local priest Father Calvin, God rest his soul, and we became part of the church.’

This built strongly on his own religious experience as being a part of a parish in Sea City and attending a small Roman Catholic primary school. John, though, recognises that there was a significant change when he moved. He had expected to go to secondary school but in East Midtown there was a first, middle and upper school system. This sense of displacement emphasised for him the importance of his faith community:

‘... whereas some of my new friends were rebelling against religion I was this new kid and one of the things that really grounded me in East Midtown was the church.’

A significant change occurred as John moved to the Catholic upper school, and key to this was his new RE teacher Mrs González:

‘... the reason I’m sitting in this room is because one of my secondary teachers.’

He continued,

‘I came across, one of my heroes Mrs González ... an RE teacher who, I think, bucked the trend in a Catholic school in the 1980’s in so far as it wasn’t about instruction, she changed the name to religious studies, which she says now caused many a shock and horror from some of the governors, but she wanted us to explore religion and to explore different religions, different ethical viewpoints, philosophy, non religious backgrounds and I remember her taking us to a mosque and I think it was a bit of shock horror at the time.’

During the interviews he mentioned his regret at not seeing his teacher, Mrs González, for ‘quite a while’ and it is clear that for John she remained a significant person after leaving school, having that status of ‘hero’, as does his Communion book in a different way. This led John to a reappraisal of his own worldview:

‘I remember keep saying to myself aren’t these [different religious traditions] really similar, why are we finding out there are so many differences in the world when actually they are getting around to roughly the same God ... eventually. Though crude to say that obviously and maybe, but as a teenager I started to really realise that there was more out there.’

GCSE cemented his love for the subject and caught his fascination:

‘My interest in religion developed at GCSE ... I loved the Ethics of GCSE Religion, Religious Studies, but I also had a bizarre liking for Biblical exposition.’

John’s experience of GCSE further cemented his ‘love’ for his teacher:

‘But what my teacher did ... I remember her saying we were the top set, if there was such a thing in that school, but she used to say to us this isn’t in the exam but I’m teaching you it anyway. And that’s what I loved about her because she was ... well you need to know more, this is more than ... RE is more than a subject about passing an exam...’

It was not a forgone conclusion that RE would be his favourite and he had had a real fascination with History. He also notes that he was getting ‘bored’ with church.

During his secondary schooling he was Confirmed but this was not without issue for him looking back, it did though coincide with his growing interest with RE:

... [that was the time]I fell in love with RE and it was at a time when I was getting really bored of church, I was getting bored of my own Christianity, I was getting bored of being forced, I mean my mum would slap me for saying this but, I think she would, I think I got forced to be Confirmed even though that's so ironic because it should have been my decision. I was told you're getting Confirmed, no son of mine's not getting Confirmed, you're carrying on with the faith and ... she's mellowed a lot in older years... but she ... it was, I rebelling against, as many teenagers do, against Christianity.'

He goes on to say:

'... ... but the one thing I didn't rebel against was the fact that RE ... I absolutely loved ... in school and that was my interest in religions because ... she just made us question and it was amazing.'

When asked if she had had an impact on him as a teacher John responded:

'Huge, huge and I've said ... after I'd finished my PGCE I was still in some contact, you know you lose contact as you go but and its sickens me she's left the profession.'

John's love for RE and GCSE RS did not mean that he was automatically go on to do A Level Religious Studies as this was not part of his imagined carrier path:

'I did A level RE, English, History and Economics. I did 4. You could in those days. So but RE was the fourth as such because I wanted to be a lawyer at the time don't know why but I wanted to be a lawyer and went on work experience in Year 10 loved it ...'

It was another teacher intervening that led to John doing Religious Studies:

‘I remember Reverend Carpenter who, interesting man, one of the few Catholic priests that was married, because he was Anglican and become Catholic and he converted to Catholicism he was a senior leader and an RE teacher in school and I remember on results day him saying to me your are doing RE ...’

Recalling the course he states:

‘I loved the course, the course was amazing.’

As a result John made the decision to go and study Theology at University, although not a Catholic university. He had initially wanted to go to East Midcity but was rejected and ended up reading Theology in his second choice university in Northcity. This came at some emotional cost, the rejection letter arrived on Christmas Eve 1993 but Northcity proved to be a good second choice:

‘Their course was amazing, I really wanted to study a Biblical language, which they offered, my Greek is now appalling but it was okay back in the 90’s. So again I want that sort of ... I wanted to carry on a traditional RE course ... I wanted some Christian scripture ... I also saw courses that were just wonderful for me, like I got really really fascinated by the Sociology of Religion ... and ... the Philosophy of Religion, both of which I took units in in my three years.’

He also had the opportunity to study non-Christian religions and focussed on the study of Buddhism.

During his time at Northcity he carried on participating in the life of the local Catholic church but less frequently attending Mass and at times going to services of other Christian denominations, especially the Quaker Meeting and also going with a Jewish friend to synagogue. He described it in terms of ‘experiment’. John had gone off the idea of being a lawyer and decided that he wanted to teach but decided not to go straight in to a PGCE course. Rather, he returned to Midtown and went back, in one sense, to his source of inspiration:

‘I’d started to get really inspired by Miss González ... I thought this would be a good job for me, but then I thought: I’ve got to try and work out whether this is for me. So I went and became a special need classroom assistant in a special SLD school in East Midtown. I managed to secure a post for a year. With the very clear intention I told them that of during that year I’d be applying for PGCE courses.’

John’s sister had previously done a PGCE course and he followed her by applying to Westmid University. It was at Westmid that John met another inspiration, Dolores Grace:

‘... so, but, yes Dolores was our course leader and was again superb, just absolutely wonderful.’

As part of the course there was an expectation that students would learn curriculum planning, which Dolores taught.

‘So one of our first assignments was to design a scheme of work and then to implement it at our placement school. So ... we had to look at the pedagogy and thinking behind schemes of work and development of curriculum and then we actually had to put it into practice and evaluate it.’

When asked as to whether this experience had been important for his career as an RE teacher he responded:

‘Yeah. It certainly ... [within the church schools context] I’ve become very used to the luxury of planning a curriculum around time and around space and around expertise.’

As well as this new inspiration John’s placements were also significant. His first school was one where RE was not a priority for the head teacher. The school was not, according to John, fulfilling the statutory requirement as set out in the locally agreed syllabus. There had been a shock to the community just before he arrived when it was announced that the main employer in the town was closing down and that everyone understood the implications. But what stood out was the RE team:

‘The RE team there were amazing, they were a community school, RE was not treated [as] remotely serious by the head teacher, I look now, obviously I didn’t say that to him, it was his school, it was his choice.’

John’s first experience of teaching was not the most positive:

‘I remember the first ever Year 10 lesson I went into I thought “what the hell have I decided to do here?” ... “why am I doing this?” because .. it was like a riot and I thought: “I’m sure its not me, I’m new I don’t know what I’m doing here yet”’

The overall impact of this first experience was not lost on John:

‘... it was a great learning experience for me because ... when I become a head of department I’m not going to work somewhere like that!’

From this school he went on to a school that drew largely from a rural population. Notably here John mentions the name of a teacher, Liz.

‘I went to a school in East Midtownshire a massive rural school served about 30-40 villages in rural Easternshire but the RE there was that was my second placement my big placement. It was amazing, they all did GCSE RE, Liz my mentor there, she was just really good. She was like ... there was a two-person department the Humanities one. So it was small but they just she said, “no we are doing RE GCSE and we’re doing Buddhism and Christianity that’s what we’re doing”.’

These experiences, though, helped John to make a very important decision about his future as he made a conscious decision to move into the Catholic sector. He completed his NQT year in a Catholic secondary school but this was not without some difficulty and eventually he moved into the Anglican sector as he increasingly became alienated from the Catholic Church:

‘Well I’ve got an objection to some of the Catholic Church’s doctrines and so I wouldn’t consider myself of the Catholic faith now. I mean again, wouldn’t I tell my

mother that ... no I'm not too sure I would. Have I officially moved to the Church of England, no I haven't but I'm, my involvement within regular faith, a faith commitment, I will go to a Church of England church near where I live now a couple of times a month, once a month if there's too much football. I know that's awful.'

As John is an openly gay man who is married and describes his spouse as his husband it would be difficult for a Catholic school to employ him. This in part explains his move from Catholic education to Anglican education where there is no obvious psychic cost (Reay, Crozier and James 2011) due to a fundamental tension with the denominational beliefs and expectations placed on teachers¹⁸

As he had read Theology and done his PGCE at 'non-religious' universities he did not find the move to a Church of England setting difficult, which he might have done if he had gone to a Roman Catholic university or institution, but he did go on courses run by Diocesan advisory services to develop his own knowledge and understanding of what was expected in an Anglican school. John was also put through SIAMS training, something he has persisted with. Later he went on to do an MA in Religious Education at Metropolitan Institute College where his dissertation focussed on the difference between SIAMS and Ofsted inspections. When asked about whether he had done anything about curriculum planning John replies:

'I tried to avoid it ... no I did ... I was looking, I did some wacky units, I suppose it is curriculum based. I did one of using museums and historical sites as a source of learning in the curriculum. I did Holocaust education.'

It was clear to John that the curriculum in RE is there to serve as a vehicle for something other than content delivery. John states:

'[RE] its wonderful. When you see kids. I taught a lesson yesterday. Because RE is the one subject I think in the curriculum that allows kids to have a voice at all times.'

¹⁸ See: The Sacred Congregation For Catholic Education 1982: Lay Catholics In Schools: Witnesses To Faith. Paragraph 32ff
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19821015_lay-catholics_en.html)

And I really strongly believe in GCSE, although I hate lots of what they've done to GCSE [in the] reform and it bugs the hell out of me, when I am in a classroom I can still say to kids, what do you think, what's this about?'

The school

The school is situated in a predominantly white area with approximately 30% of the population economically inactive and 4% of the economically active unemployed. With regard to religion most people within the area identified with Christianity and, with the exception of a small number of Jews and Sikhs, the area surrounding the school is less religiously diverse in terms of population density than the local authority as a whole. John notes, though, that the school attracts large numbers of Nigerian and South American students, the latter predominantly Spanish speaking. Ofsted and SIAMs recognised that the school is more diverse than the national average.

The local population is twice as likely to be in an elementary occupation and more likely to have no or lower level qualifications than the local authority. The number of pupils in the school who receive the pupil premium is also above the average. Hence, it can be surmised that the school is drawing its pupils from a much wider area than the local community and from those with economically disadvantaged backgrounds. At the time of the research the school met all of its floor targets set by the government.

Historically Ofsted had judged the school to be Good but the latest inspection had judged that the school 'Requires Improvement'. The latest SIAMS inspection, though, judged school Outstanding when it came to RE specifically. The school's Progress 8¹⁹ score was below average. The school entered a lower percentage of pupils for the EBacc than the schools in local authority or those nationally, although the percentage of pupils achieving the EBacc was the same as the local authority average and in line with the national average. It is of note that the percentage of pupils staying on in

¹⁹ Progress 8 and Ebacc are Secondary accountability measures introduced in 2016: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/progress-8-school-performance-measure>

education or employment at the time of the research was significantly lower than the percentage when compared to the local authority and national averages at the same point in time. One fifth of all pupils have English as an additional language and 6% of students have more than one foreign language.

Therefore it is reasonable to assume that a substantial number of pupils are from first generation migrant families.

Table 27: Ethnicity in the ward where the school is situated

Ethnicity	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
White (all categories)	53.5	81.7
Mixed (all categories)	7.4	0.7
Asian (Indian sub-continent)	2.7	5.7
Asian (Chinese and other)	6.5	4.6
Black (all categories)	27.1	1.6
Other (all categories)	2.6	0.3

Table 28: Religion in the ward where the school is situated

Religion	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
Christianity	52.8	60.4
Buddhist	1.3	0.4
Hindu	2.4	1.3
Jewish	0.2	0.4
Muslim	6.4	4.1
Sikh	0.2	0.6
Other religion	0.5	0.6
No religion	27.2	25.2
Not stated	8.9	7.5

Table 29: Level of education for those 16 and over in the ward where the school is situated

Level of education – 16 and over	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
No qualifications	17.7	23.2
Level 1	11.1	13.4
Level 2	12.5	15.2
Level 3	10.8	11.9
Level 4 and above	38.0	14.6
Apprenticeship	1.4	3.6
Other	8.5	5.6

Table 30: Occupation in the ward where the school is situated

Occupation	Statistics for the local authority area by %	Area where the school is situated by %
Managers, directors and senior officials	9.7	9.5
Professional occupations	22.6	16.7
Associate professional and technical occupations	16.5	7.2
Administrative and secretarial occupations	11.8	9.3
Skilled trades occupations	8.1	8.8
Caring, leisure and other service occupations	9.4	10.8
Sales and customer service occupations	7.6	8.6
Process, plant and machine operatives	4.1	7.6
Elementary occupations	10.2	21.7

The school's prospectus states:

‘Our aim is to be a strong Christian community in which children and adults - all of whom reflect the goodness of God - can flourish. It has developed a curriculum to meet the needs of its pupils in the context of east Metropolis, an area of social disadvantage.’

King Edward's also had a strong focus on character education and on pupil voice.

Religious education in the school

The school's website clearly stated that it followed the diocesan board of education's syllabus, whilst this was true for the primary phase it was not so for the secondary. The diocesan policy referred to the importance of learning about (AT1) and learning from (AT2) religion reflecting the National Framework for RE (QCA 2004). The diocese also actively promoted Philosophy for Children (P4C) as both suitable and desirable as a way of supporting religious education.

Table 31: Key Stage 3 Programme of Study for RE

Unit	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9
1	<p><i>God, me and my neighbour</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is RE? 2. The UK as a multi-faith society and how it has changed 3. How religions are expressed / understood 4. Local study of religion 5. What are the 6 main religions, their 	<p><i>Islam</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The life of Muhammad (recap) 2. Key Muslim beliefs, teachings and practices 3. The nature of Allah 4. The 5 pillars of Islam 5. The 6 key beliefs 6. Shar'iah law 7. Challenging Muslim stereotypes 	<p><i>God is and I am..</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does God exist? 2. Teleological / cosmological arguments 3. Character of God 4. Suffering 5. Character of Job 6. How far is suffering caused by human action?

	beliefs and practices?	8. Key Islamic concepts	7. Christian responses to suffering 8. Responses to evil; philosophers e.g. Karl Marx 9. Philosophy 10. The conversion of Nicky Cruz? 11. Humanism
2	<i>Bible Overview: Old Testament</i> 6. How is the Bible structured? 7. Abrahamic religions 8. Jerusalem 9. Creation 10. The Fall of Man and Original Sin 11. Covenant – Noah, and Abraham 12. Isaac / Ishmael 13. Law – Moses and the Decalogue, 14. Passover and atonement – sacrifice 15. Elijah 16. The Line of David 17. Prophecies	<i>Islamic Holy Books</i> 9. Hadiths 10. What is the Qur'an? 11. The importance of the Qur'an 12. Muslim denominations 13. Religious war	<i>Christianity: past, present and future</i> 12. Church history 13. Church growth 14. Missionary work 15. Martin Luther King 16. The work of current religious organisations 17. Christians in persecution
3	<i>Bible Overview: New</i>	<i>The Life of Jesus and</i>	<i>Moral Issues</i>

	<i>Testament</i> 18. Incarnation of Jesus 19. Redemption, salvation, grace 20. Judgement	<i>Holy Week</i> 14. The mission of Jesus 15. Miracles 16. Parables 17. Understand the key events and the significance of Holy Week and how this points to Jesus being the Messiah	18. Situation ethics 19. Abortion 20. Euthanasia 21. Ethical demands for Muslims e.g. dress, food 22. Politics vs religion 23. Free will vs pre-determination 24. How useful are the parables /Beatitudes for moral decision making today? 25. Are religious people more moral than non-religious people? 26. Non-religious ethics 27. Unitarian Church 28. Absolutism v relativism: Do all religions lead to God?
4	<i>Indian Religions</i> 21. Origins of religion 22. Key beliefs and practices; key teachings - death 23. Monotheistic / polytheistic religions	<i>Key Christian Beliefs and Practices</i> 18. Trinity 19. Denominations 20. Local church 21. Practices 22. Sacraments – baptism and Eucharist	<i>Introduce Year 10 GCSE content</i>

		23. Prayer 24. Liturgical and non-liturgical	
5	<i>The Life of Muhammad</i> 24. Birth, conversion, beginnings of Islam, teachings, followers and practices	<i>Rites of Passage</i> 25. Birth 26. Commitment to religion 27. Marriage 28. Death	

Each year is divided into five ‘units’. The numbers in each term do not correspond to lessons rather notional weeks, which may be extended. An example given was Unit 2 of Year 8, where the department was focussing more on denominations within Islam than Islamic Holy Books, as this provided important background for later GCSE. It was clear from the conversation with John that the Key Stage 3 curriculum was heavily inflected with the need to prepare pupils for GCSE and there was a sense of anxiety that the introduction of new and increased content as a result of GCSE reform since 2010 had wrong footed RE departments. John’s attitude to these reforms was less than positive:

‘I hate lots of what they’ve done to GCSE [in the] reform and it bugs the hell out of me ...’

The programme of study was downloadable from the St Edward’s website and was available to parents. 75% of all RE was focussed on Christianity with 25% on other religious and non-religious traditions. Pupils had 100 minutes of RE every five day cycle, meaning that 6.6% of all curriculum time at KS3 was dedicated to RE. The programme of study (Table 32) came about after John had been at the school for one year, moving from a similar Anglican school where he had formed part of the senior leadership team. As a department they decided to review the RE curriculum at KS3 working as a team. The team consisted of three teachers:

John: Deputy Head and curriculum lead for RE

Annabelle: Assistant Head and RE teacher

Simon: classroom based RE specialist

All three teachers have a degree in Theology and a PGCE in RE, and this is reflected in the programme of study with its focus on the Bible and key theological concepts such as Fall, Covenant, Incarnation, Redemption and Judgment. According to John the programme of study was done as a whole team but there was a clear process of involved:

1. the team negotiated the content of the programme
2. the head of Humanities and the Curriculum Deputy reviewed and then 'approved' it
3. John then went back through the programme of study with his 'SIAMS hat on' and then presented to the governors.

Stage three allowed John to use his professional judgement and experience to change and adapt the programme as he saw fit. In the process he had power of veto on any previous work done by colleagues and the authority to do that as Deputy Head. Nevertheless he stressed the collaborative nature of the exercise.

When asked what informed the programme of study's development – although the review was not de novo – he identified six clear influences:

- the locally agreed syllabus
- the diocesan syllabus
- GCSE criteria
- Pupils' backgrounds
- Pupil voice
- Parental voice

It is not obvious, however, how the agreed syllabus had been used, if it has at all. The syllabus requires schools to teach about Christianity and five other world religions. The programme of study at St Edward's is focussed almost exclusively on Christianity and Islam, with three weeks given to 'Indian' religions, which in this case means those religions characterised as Dharmic: Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism. The locally agreed syllabus had two bridging units for the transition between Year 6 and Year 7 and Unit 1 has some features of these units but there is no direct correlation between the documents. The syllabus had a Unit of inter faith encounter and dialogue that was absent from the programme of study.

Given that there was no diocesan syllabus for the secondary phase at the time of the writing of the programme of study its identification as a source must relate to some memory of a prior syllabus that informed the previous programme of study.

GCSE was the most significant consideration in developing the planning for RE and the curriculum offer had started to change as a result of the latest Ofsted inspection, which judged the school 'Requires Improvement'. The governors and the head teacher had been clear that all KS3 subjects needed to support the attainment of pupils at KS4.

John resented this but could not get away from it at the same time. There was a key need for KS3 RE to promote and contribute to the spiritual dimension of the lives of pupils and their spiritual development as a whole. John felt a great deal of anxiety about this as the content rich curriculum was potentially pushing this aspect of a pupil's education out. There were plans to change the school's structure to a two-year KS3 and three year KS4. John consistently identified one overarching pressure and that was GCSE. After the introduction of the new GCSE specifications the department reflected on how well prepared pupils were to deal with the with the new examination specifications. John saw a key area for development had to be the department's ability to engage their pupils with religious text, something John had loved as a pupil and student but something increasingly alien to his pupils, not least because a fifth of pupils had English as a second language and others from significantly deprived backgrounds.

There was another point of discontent that arose in relation to the narrowing of the curriculum. John had made the decision to introduce Indian religions in Year 7 because he was concerned that his pupils were not being prepared for the society of which they would increasingly become a part. As well as their spiritual development there was a need to ensure pupils would become tolerant of difference, something he felt was especially true for his Black African pupils. If RE did nothing else it had to deliver on tolerance and that was difficult if so little time could be given to learning about difference. As he was moving on from being the curriculum lead for RE he was concerned that this might become more difficult, as the incoming curriculum lead may be more focussed on the need for results than the overall educational value of RE.

The prospect of doing text work did not enthuse John, who could not see the point in pupils having to memorise texts for the examination, but at the same time he saw that it was crucial if they were to do well. This caused John a real conflict as he looked forward. In his opinion the whole idea of RE being educative was being eroded in order to push an academic agenda that might mean they attain highly but miss the point of what it is all about.

Where GCSE had had most immediate impact, though, was assessment and all assessments were being developed to match the format and criteria of the examination board that the school used. John spoke about the wider skill set the school was trying to develop, especially in looking to thinkers such as Edward De Bono but when speaking about the skills the school was developing and looking at they were exclusively those needed for GCSE.

For John pupils' backgrounds were significant in terms of planning RE but it was not easy for him to see how they could be an influence in the future where RE was concerned because of the GCSE. John explained that at one time the largest minority group in the school were Black Afro-Caribbean pupils and they had traditionally done work around significant Black theologians, such as Martin Luther King Jnr., who still featured at Year 9. But there were new concerns as to how to keep the curriculum relevant and engaging. The department was developing new work for the new curriculum pattern. This included work focussing on Liberation Theology and figures

such as Oscar Romero and Maria Cristina Gomez in light of the recent influx of Latin American pupils. Similarly there were questions about how to engage Black African students, predominantly Nigerian. Nevertheless, John indicates that the issue of GCSE is the most pressing concern.

The role of pupil voice had a greater impact on pedagogy than on curriculum design but there was a sense that they had an entitlement that was not being met. Two areas came up specifically, Buddhism and non-religious worldviews. Although the latter did feature in Year 9 in Units 1 and 3 Buddhism was only touched on briefly.

Parental voice was also seen as significant but only in relation to resisting change. The Nigerian parents particularly felt that they had a voice as they were Christians, as John noted:

‘this is a Christian school and their children should have a Christian education.’

Therefore it was difficult to reduce the amount of teaching about Christianity without losing the confidence of a significant number of parents. As the school has less than 800 pupils on role this could cause the school real problems.

It was notable that John did not mention the Church of England’s resource Understanding Christianity until it was introduced as a question. He said that the diocese had not been part of its development and was not a pilot area for the resource. Nevertheless, the theological underpinning and language of Understanding Christianity was clearly there and this, John believed, was down to the formal theological background of his colleagues and himself.

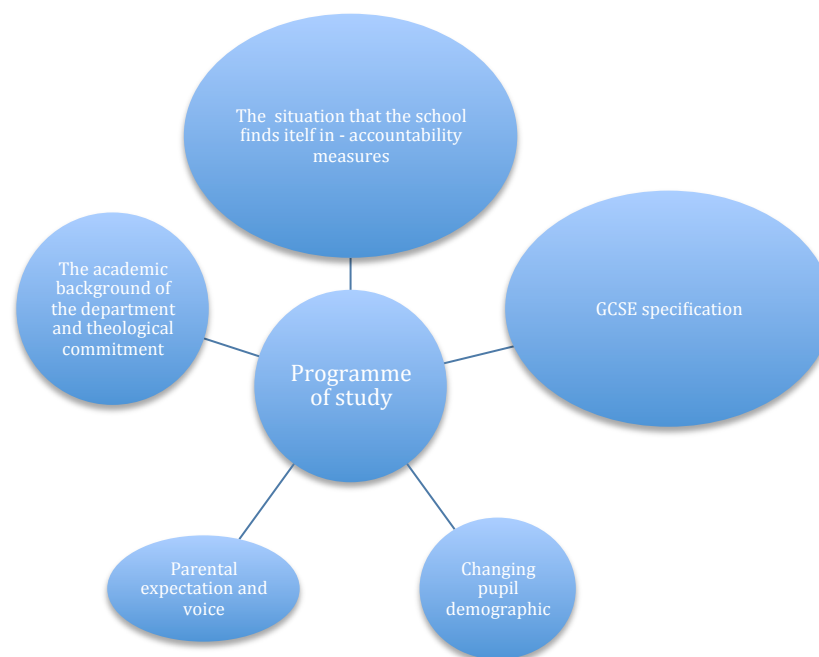
Discussion

During the course of John’s personal story as it applies to RE it is of note that it is the specifics of the subject that enthused him, such as Biblical exegesis. This passion carried on through his degree and, inspired by his RE teacher from secondary school, Miss González. During his professional career, though, he seems to move away from the love of the content to the love of what the content can facilitate. Thereby giving the impression that content is a tool, which serves a more significant or primary

purpose. This was clearly being challenged as a result of the need to prepare pupils for GCSE, which was the major issue and concern raised when exploring the programme of study. John noted that curriculum is only ever transitional and he emphasised the importance of skills, although those he mentioned were directly related to GCSE, as could be seen from the way that assessment had changed once the levels of attainment had gone.

The influences that came to bear on the programme of study have roots clearly in John's own academic and faith background, although he identifies himself as an Anglican his knowledge and understanding of Liberation Theology relates more clearly to his Roman Catholic background. The theological focus, with sociological aspects of the programme of study has resonances with his developing academic interests at Northcity University. Being in a group of others with a similar theological background enabled the development of a programme of study which has clear theological language and a clear theological progression – for instance in Year 7 the Christian understanding of the Old Testament followed by the New Testament in Year 8, and the focus on Christian history and futures in Year 9. This, though, is moderated in a number of ways, mostly by GCSE due to the pressure on the school to perform well relative to the accountability measures set by government, leading to the two year KS3 as opposed to the three year KS3 at the time of the research – noting that GCSE RS starts in Year 9. There are, though, other influences on the programme of study, two specifically, the profile of pupils and their parents, although these work out in different ways in the school. What is less clear is how John used his veto on the planning that the team had developed, he did not talk about this. The influences on John's decision making is presented in Figure 5, which indicates the magnitude of the influence by the size of disc.

Figure 5: Influences on John's programme of study – showing the differential level of influence



Conclusion

Given the importance of key people John encountered and the experiences he had when he was growing up it is not clear, other than being sources of inspiration, that they had a direct influence on how John engaged with curriculum planning. This may be because his practices were modified by the structure of the school. Although he had the ultimate say over the final product there were a clear set of checks and balances within the school. He claimed that Mrs González had a significant impact on his RE teaching, and there was certainly a commitment to teach about non-Christian religions, but the significance of the school's situation and increasing scrutiny of the school's results had a clear shaping influence on all curriculum. John was clearly happy in his religious commitment and in his professional life but he noted that he could not tell his mother that he is no longer Catholic as such, being a gay man in a committed relationship.

The case study is situated in the context of a particular point in the history of education in England. The power of the state to exert influence indirectly through accountability linked to performance in public examinations is notable here. The

programme of work responded to changes in GCSE but the school was changing its curriculum planning so as to maximise its results in light of a Progress 8 score which needs to be consistently average or above and the school found itself below. Despite the religious foundation of the school and the religious commitment of its staff in the end what matter are the results and the curriculum increasingly reflects this.

Chapter 6: Multiple Case Study Analysis

Introduction

In this chapter I bring together the case studies presented in Chapters 4 and 5 to analyse them as multiple case studies (Yin 2012). The case studies present similar but different portraits of RE curriculum planning and here I compare and contrast those portraits, using pattern matching. The process involved going back through each case study, identifying similarities and differences and organising the findings according to pre-determined categories, referred to as 'areas' in the methodology chapter. As set out in the methodology chapter these areas, which were further subdivided, arose from the work of Carmin and Balser, as adapted by me (see Table 2), and are:

History

1. Personal histories
2. Professional histories

Beliefs and Values

3. The aims and purposes of RE

Cluster of Circumstances

4. Scrutiny
5. Accountability
6. Resources

In this chapter I turn each area, as subdivided, into a question to investigate the data and thereby identify the influences on teachers planning when compared to each other. As a result of this process other questions arose, which have also been posed. As stated in the methodology chapter I had already made the decision that the epistemological basis of my research is rooted in critical realism, which favours epistemological pluralism and opportunism (Patomaki and Wight 2000:216). As a result I do not focus simply on one source of data from the case studies, such as teacher narrative. Rather, I bring together different data sources common to each school to produce a more rounded analysis. Oancea (2005) recognised that making a

judgement about what constitutes knowledge is not simple and that there is a continuum between research concepts such as convergence and divergence when making valid knowledge claims. Therefore, knowledge claims presented here about these teachers is provisional and particular, as they do not constitute a representative sample.

In this research I agree with the position of Goodson (1989:140 cited in Norris 2008) in his call for a more sophisticated approach to understanding curriculum:

‘Developing our studies of curriculum at individual and collective levels demands that our historical analyses work across the levels of individual lives and group action and assess relations between individuals, between groups and between individuals and groups.’

The teachers discussed in the previous two chapters are not merely reorganising a set curriculum to meet the needs of their context, for none of them is using the sources necessary to do that, rather they are curriculum creators in a more direct sense, as Goodson would have recognised.

When I began the research I was minded to look at the work of Young and Lambert et al (2014), which indicated that schools in socio-economically deprived areas are likely to have a more locally based curriculum than schools in economically prosperous areas. As there was no evidence that this was the case I decided not to pursue this thread. I recognise that these six themes might work out very differently with a larger number of schools.

In the following pages I present the areas identified above, give a short introduction based on the literature followed by a series of questions. The answers to these questions are based on the case studies as presented in the previous two chapters.

History

Personal histories

In the White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) there is a paradigm that surrounds ‘teacher becoming’, it is a story about the engagement of young people

with subject knowledge, with inspiring teachers, with university, with the desire to transmit culturally significant knowledge to pupils and thus educate them in the process. I have discussed this paradigm and RE teachers elsewhere (Hampshire 2013). There is a presumption that personal history is important in why teachers become the sorts of teachers they do and how that goes on to shape something of how they go about teaching their subject – here with a focus on secondary teachers. Sikes and Everington (2001:10) quote Goodson: 'in understanding something so intensely personal as teaching it is critical we know about the person the teacher is'. They give three reasons why life history methodology is so useful:

- it explicitly recognises that lives are not hermetically compartmentalised into, for example, the person we are at work (the professional self) and who we are at home (parent/child/partner selves), and that the things which happen to us in one area of our lives have implications and repercussions for other areas too;
- it acknowledges the crucial relationship between individuals and historical and social circumstances;
- it provides evidence to show how individuals experience, create and make sense of the rules and roles of the social worlds in which they live. (Op.Cit p10)

The importance of personal history was more apparent for some of the teachers in this study than others.

Does personal history make a difference in curriculum planning?

For some teachers there was a clear trajectory to becoming an RE teacher. Where teachers believed from an 'early age' that they wanted to be an RE teacher personal history appeared to have greater significance and influence than for those teachers who found themselves as RE teachers by happenstance. It is worth noting, though, that for none of the teachers who had a clear trajectory was primary school deemed important, rather it was secondary school where decisions about becoming an RE teacher were formed.

Born an RE teacher?

For Juwayriyah, secondary schooling was significant in her desire to become an RE teacher. It was a key person who brought RE alive for her and a succession of inspiring teachers that led her to go on to read Religious Studies, and then training to be an RE teacher. This was not dissimilar to John. John's secondary schooling was significant, although it did not occur to him to be a teacher in the first place. It was inspirational teachers who inspired him in RE and who he wanted to emulate. At 6th Form his desire to read Theology grew and whilst at university he decided he wanted to be a teacher. The power of inspirational people in John's and Juwayriyah's personal stories cannot be overestimated. Juwayriyah intended to return to teaching RE in her 6th Form College to be with her inspiration. John had kept in touch with one of his teachers. The love of RE and RE teachers needs to be seen in a broader context.

Juwayriyah and John share another aspect of their lives, a religious upbringing. Both were socialised in religious communities and had a 'natural' interest in religion and things religious from an early age, both talk about the significance of text. Their choices of what to teach, though, were very different, even though they shared similar views as to the nature and purpose of RE. In Juwayriyah's case these choices were made, in part, by the need to ensure that non-specialist members of staff had a form of religious education that they could not only deliver but where they could make sense of the purpose for RE, as articulated by her. John's context was different in that all of his teachers were specialist with a commitment to denominational RE.

Jacob had an a-religious upbringing and never intended to be a teacher, let alone an RE teacher. Jacob's personal history did have brush with religion through his encounter with grandparents, who were nominally Anglican. For him, religion was not what people like him did. Where he grew up, lived and for those with whom his family socialised, religion was simply absent. RE at his secondary school appeared idiosyncratic, resource driven with a focus on moral issues. It was not inspirational and he did not identify teachers by name, unlike John and Juwayriyah. Nevertheless, his curriculum offer was in many ways almost identical to Juwayriyah's, both structurally and in terms of the desired outcome. However, Juwayriyah's aspiration

for RE, in the long term, was different to that of Jacob. He believed that his RE offer was the best it could be and it was rooted in his personal story, in that it did not privilege one religion over another. Interestingly, though, his a-religious upbringing did not incline him to teach about non-religious worldviews.

Kevin and John were both socialised in the same religious tradition but Kevin had no intention of being a teacher. He was left uninspired by his teachers but faith was significant for him and he considered entering the priesthood or the religious life. As a result of a number of factors, he trained to be a teacher, but mainly because the religious order he was considering joining thought it to be a good thing, and then he decided to get married. Teaching became the way he could support his family, something he was qualified to do but not something he saw as part of a historic continuity where he was passing on what his teachers had bequeathed him.

Kevin's life of faith was significant, however he wanted to put clear water between himself as a person of faith and his teaching of RE. Whilst John's and Kevin's curriculum offer share much in common – both being in Anglican secondary schools – the aim of RE was different. John shared his aim for RE with Juwayriyah, Jacob and Yooifi but not Kevin. Kevin's personal history is distinct in one specific way, that whilst he was born in England, from an early age he was brought up and socialised in a different country, he went to university there and trained to be a teacher there. All the others were born and brought up in England.

To understand Kevin's vision of RE and why he developed the curriculum offer he did in his school it is necessary to look at the contemporary debates about the nature and purpose of RE in the Republic of Ireland where he was socialised, educated and qualified (see Shanahan 2017; Whittle 2015 and 2018). What is difficult to know is to what extent this difference can be attributed to Kevin's personal experience of religious education as a child or to his professional formation, and whether these are realistically separable. Nevertheless, Kevin's narrative about his personal life paints a grim picture of his early religious socialisation and education until his teen years, when he had what could be considered a conversion experience and his evangelical commitment to sharing his faith with other young people. However, he was insistent

that there was clear water between his life of faith and life as an educator within the school, even though it had a religious foundation.

Yooft was also brought up in the faith tradition of John and Kevin and shared the same frame of reference, but never intended to be an RE teacher. She purposefully concealed her tradition and her active participation in it from her pupils and was reluctant to speak to me about it as a researcher. She did not feel specifically tied to it, describing herself as a universalist, where she felt able to pray and communicate with God in any place of worship. Her whole religious life, though, revolved around the Roman Catholic parish to which she belonged. As with Jacob, she remembers little of RE at secondary school, especially KS3. Yooft was clear that she had no intention of teaching RE, described herself as 'qualified by experience'. She saw herself as an RE teacher at the time of the research; but this is distinct from her personal history or personal life.

Are personal histories significant for these teachers as curriculum leads?

Whilst Everington et al (2011) found that there was a clear link between teachers' biographies, which included personal and professional histories, and responses to diversity in their classrooms, there is no clear evidence that personal history was a specific influence on these five teachers of RE in their planning. It is not possible to speculate how personal histories might have an impact on classroom management or teaching style, but when John and Juwayriyah talked about their inspirational teachers, it was about the classroom experience they wanted to create rather than the curriculum offer as a whole.

Jacob talked about the impact of becoming involved in debating at school and university and how that had an impact on his classroom practice; taking on the mantle of the 'neutral' teacher where he can present the faiths and beliefs of others in such a way that pupils do not know whether he assents to those faiths and beliefs or not. For Jacob there was a strong theme that not having a religious personal history or commitment was an advantage when being an RE teacher. Jacob had never been challenged about his presumed neutrality when it came to presenting a religious tradition in his teaching. He was unaware that his assumption could be problematic

and was a contested concept in RE, when it came to classroom practice (Cooling 2012; Donovan 1990; Kimanen and Poulter 2018; Kyritsis and Tsakyrakis 2013). It is possible to attribute this to his upbringing, not only in terms of his love of debate, but also in the fact that neither his family nor he had made any strong existential commitment to a set of beliefs. Not making such a commitment can lead to the belief that ‘commitment’ has a negative impact on neutrality, something he clearly articulated.

It is not possible to claim that there was a relationship between specific personal histories, or the impact that growing up in a specific context had on these teachers’ planning. However, there is evidence that the socio-cultural-political context in which these teachers grew up, although not necessarily lived in the present, did have an impact in one specific way. This was to do with the articulation of the purpose of RE, considered below. The specifics of planning could not be assigned to any particular part of their personal stories in these cases. The unacknowledged influence of context in which teachers’ personal stories were formed could not be explored directly, but research would indicate that teachers’ underlying cultural assumptions are not easy to identify or overcome (Aroua, Coquide and Abbes 2009; Englund, Olofsson and Price 2017) and this will be further explored in the next chapter.

Professional histories

Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) put professional history alongside personal history as significant for understanding teacher agency in relation to curriculum planning. Afdal (2010; 2008) sees religious education teachers as a community of practice within the community of practice of teachers generally – given they are at an intersection between the community of educators and the community of religion. There is a sense of traditioning in the works of Afdal and Priestly et al where teachers form part of a tradition handed down through specific forms of professional induction and development. Their analysis may apply more to Europe with its tradition of pedagogics and Scotland with its own history and tradition of teacher education and professional standing. That curriculum features heavily in teachers’ self-understanding is not always clear, though. Young and Erickson (2011:128) observed that:

‘It is interesting to note that our narratives of self-as-teacher do not centre on technical expertise or even mastery of curriculum.’

Burn (2007), investigating the processes of curriculum development within a collaborative partnership for initial teacher education for Secondary History found that what was considered to be ‘located at the heart of the discipline’ (Op.Cit p453) was often poorly taught, inadequately understood and highly contentious. Connelly, Clandinin and He (1997) conclude that where teachers are situated in their own ‘life cycle’ as a teacher, led to different responses to curriculum guidelines, so that at different stages of their careers teachers will produce different curricula from the same base.

These studies start from a base that there is a clear understanding by the teacher, and those around them, that what it is to be a teacher is more or less clearly defined. They do not appear to consider those teachers who start off in one place but may find themselves somewhere different; a place where they may be constructing curriculum for which they are not prepared and in which they have no history. The debates about what constitutes ‘knowledge’ in curriculum terms (Burn 2007) may not concern the individual teacher, as s/he may not be aware that such debates are taking place. It should be expected that those who had been trained to teach in a specific curriculum discipline would be aware of those conversations as a result of their training and induction in a discipline.

Created an RE teacher?

As with their personal histories, Juwayriyah’s and John’s professional histories share marked commonalities. They both studied Theology or Religious Studies and did a PGCE in RE. They were both at elite universities for their degrees and initial teacher training, Juwayriyah having continuity of institution throughout. But from that moment onwards their professional histories were different. John worked in schools with a religious foundation and the contexts that he found himself in valued his specialist knowledge. This was not the case for Juwayriyah when she took up her post in the school featured in the research. She was not employed as an RE teacher and it was not obvious that she would have that role until she convinced the head teacher of the need for ‘proper’ RE.

John and Kevin share more of their professional histories not simply because of what they studied and where they worked, but also because they taught in the same school for a period of time. In some respects John and Kevin's planning shared more similarities than they did with the others, but there were some clearly marked differences. John's planning clearly had a logic that was understandable in terms of Christian theology, although where to place non-Christian religions he found more problematic. John was driven by the need to ensure pupils were prepared for GCSE, and to this extent his planning more resembled that of Yoofi. Kevin's planning was more chaotic. This was because for Kevin the acquisition of knowledge and understanding – with the exception of some essentials – was less important than skill acquisition and dealing with the big questions of life. There was more of the Philosophical about Kevin's planning and more of the Theological about John's.

Where John stands out, is that he was the only teacher of this group who could remember anything about learning how to plan a scheme of work in RE, and how to do that coherently. None of the others remembered anything about having to learn to plan the curriculum, with the exception of Juwayriyah for whom it had no discernable impact – being given the clear message during her placement that planning was not all that important in RE.

Kevin and Yoofi brought things with them to their schools when they were given the role of leading and planning RE, this was less in terms of planning as a whole than introducing some things that they believed to be important in their new contexts. In effect, they brought units they enjoyed teaching as opposed to programmes of study. One explanation for the incoherence of Kevin's programme of study and the emerging deconstruction of Yoofi's school's programme of study, was their desire to bring in units of work that they valued from a previous context. Teachers in Kevin's school were given the opportunity to develop units and experiment with them, where successful, they were put into the programme of study leading to greater incoherence at the level of overall structure. It does not follow that teachers themselves do not provide a coherent explanatory narrative for themselves or their pupils, but this could not be tested in this study. Yoofi was clear that although she had brought things to the school there, was a process of negotiation that went on with non-specialist staff as to

what could be changed in the programme of study that they had been delivering. As she constructed her 'RE-ness' as being qualified by experience, she believed that it was only right to carry over the good things she has previously done into a new context.

Jacob's experience was different again. This was the only school he had taught in and it was where he had done his initial teacher training. For him, the curriculum he finally planned with colleagues was set and unquestionable. He drew on Ofsted's judgement as to what should be delivered in RE but knowingly ignored parts of that which he felt should not apply; even though his academy was committed to delivering the locally agreed syllabus, which the inspection said the school should follow. His professional experience was rooted in Citizenship education and RE was planned as a form of Citizenship. For him, as for Kevin, the specifics of the programme of study were less important than the skills acquired in the process. Jacob promoted debate and Kevin philosophy, but to different ends.

With only one teacher, John, was it possible to tie specific planning to a specific part of their professional history. This history had placed him in schools with high levels of diversity and he wanted his curriculum to reflect those identities. He reflected on the changes that had been made, and for him, needed to be made, to ensure that pupils could see themselves in the curriculum. What is evident is that John's choices in curriculum change were directed at the changing significant minorities coming to the school. There was no sense that the curriculum needed to be adapted to enable White British pupils to recognise themselves in the RE programme of study. The question of how to meet the needs of the majority were not considered by any teacher in this study, other than their need to learn about others.

Are professional histories significant for these teachers as curriculum leads?

It is possible to distinguish between those teachers who became RE teachers by desire and those who became RE teachers by circumstance. There is no evidence, though, that these different trajectories had any specific impact on what they planned for RE, with the exception of John. In two cases, Yoofi and Kevin, they brought units of work with them to their current schools, but there was no bringing over a coherent curriculum pattern for KS3, they brought what they thought was important for pupils

and what they enjoyed teaching. That there should be a coherent curriculum plan was not something they seriously considered. Teachers with different professional histories produced similar programmes of study (Jacob and Juwayriyah) and those with similar professional histories, wholly different programmes of study (John and Juwayriyah). It is, therefore, not possible to establish a direct link between teachers' professional histories and their construction of curriculum on the basis of this study.

Beliefs and Values

When exploring teacher's beliefs and values, I made the decision to restrict the research to beliefs and values relating specifically to religious education. Teachers' personal beliefs did come up in the interviews, although these were not interrogated so as to establish ontological commitments. My focus was on how beliefs helped to shape teachers' planning and whilst there is overlap between teachers' religious or non-religious beliefs, these are only mentioned below where there appears to be an impact on the curriculum.

The aims and purposes of RE

Carmin and Balser (2002) and Fincham et al (2012) identify 'belief' as key to understanding action. I start by looking at teachers' beliefs in relation to the aims and purposes of RE. However, these beliefs are historically situated and in terms of RE there are a multiplicity of beliefs about what the aim and purpose of RE should be. Since before the 1970s there have been competing claims as to the purpose of RE in England, in part as a result of the significant demographic changes that started from the 1950s, especially in areas of major industrialisation (Copley 1997; 2005).

Grimmitt (2000) provides an interesting snapshot of different approaches to RE in England at the beginning of the 21st century. The desire to arrive at a consensus about the aims of RE has proved difficult to realise. The Commission on RE report (CoRE 2018) avoided dealing with this question directly, even though it was a stated aim of the Commission's work (CoRE 2017). As with other curriculum subjects (e.g. Burn 2007) the contested nature of what constitutes important knowledge in RE is something that appears to have been a Gordian knot. Conroy et al (2013) argue that curriculum itself has become something that is driven more by a need for the subject

to exist as opposed to something that is clearly bounded in a definition of purpose in its own right.

The RE Review (REC 2013), which was the RE Council of England and Wales's response to the National Curriculum reforms of the previous year, held that RE had three aims:

- Know about and understand a range of religions and worldviews
- Express ideas and insights about the nature, significance and impact of religions and worldviews
- Gain and deploy the skills needed to engage seriously with religions and worldviews

But the Review (Op.Cit p48) acknowledges that:

‘The nature and purpose of RE are not easy to define in straightforward, unequivocal ways.’

As with the RE Commission's Final Report (CoRE 2018) the RE Review (REC 2013) comes to no conclusion as to what the purpose of RE is or should be. Key elements of what the Commission concluded were:

‘It is about understanding the human quest for meaning, being prepared for life in a diverse world and having space to reflect on one's own worldview ... To some extent, which particular worldviews are studied is not as important as whether pupils have gained an understanding of the main elements of the National Entitlement, the core skills required, the range of academic approaches to the study of worldviews, the attitudes that enable them to work with others with whom they might disagree, and space to reflect on their own developing worldviews. (CoRE 2018:73)’

Here religious education is presented as a skill set as opposed to a body of knowledge and in many ways this reflects the position of the teachers in this study, but in different ways. There was a general consensus amongst four of the five teachers in

this study about the aim and purpose of RE. However, there was one teacher whose beliefs about the aims and purpose of RE that stands out from the others. Therefore, he presents an important point of contrast from the others that allows a clearer analysis of their beliefs.

The aims and purpose of RE, British born and educated teachers

For Jacob, John, Juwayriyah and Yoofi the overriding aim and purpose of RE was to build tolerance in their pupils towards people of difference, with a focus on religious difference.

Jacob's and Juwayriyah's curriculum was designed with this aim specifically in mind and also designed to meet the needs of non-specialist teachers. Religions are described through 'introductions' and each religion is given the same amount of curriculum time. Religions are sorted into Abrahamic religions and Dharmic religions, the former being taught in Year 7 and the latter in Year 8. Units of work focussing on Philosophy (Juwayriyah) and Citizenship (Jacob) are seen by them to cover the topics that can be counted as Christianity whilst not the teaching of Christianity per se, as envisaged by the requirement for RE, which 'shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian' (Education Reform Act 1988 8 (3)) and subsequent government guidance (DES 1994; SCAA 1994; QCA 2004; DCSF 2010). There was no consensus on the answer to the question of what a pupil needs to know in order to be tolerant.

From Jacob's perspective, pupils were, on the whole, non-religious like him but they lived in a world where they will meet people different to themselves. They need to be prepared for that world. There is a form of representational multiculturalism (Thomassen 2017) at work in Jacob's curriculum design where all are treated equally by being given the same amount of time. Those units of work that are taught 'between' learning about specific religions are focussed exclusively on Citizenship education. These units further cement the need for a more tolerant society.

Juwayriyah's programme of study parallels Jacob's design and she was keen to ensure that the school meets its responsibilities to teach and model Fundamental British Values (FBV). Whilst she promoted FBV, she focused on the concept of tolerance

above all others. Her establishing of a school 'SACRE' provides a forum for pupils from different religious backgrounds to have an influence on the curriculum so that they are represented properly. The school SACRE was itself a model of tolerance. As with Jacob, there was a form of representational multiculturalism at work with no one religious tradition privileged over another.

John and Yoofi also held that pupils need to learn about non-Christian religions, other than Islam, so that they can become tolerant, given that they will encounter Islam at KS4 for GCSE. They were not able to design a curriculum like Jacob or Juwayriyah as they were constrained by the need to ensure pupils were GCSE ready. This belief did have a direct impact on the curriculum design. John was more successful in this, as he was working at senior leadership level but he was aware that RE must also meet the perceived needs of pupils from particular ethnic backgrounds who need be able to see themselves in the curriculum. Drawing back on his own experience of Catholic education, where there was a teacher who modelled openness to other religious traditions, he brought in Dharmic religions because he felt that pupils needed to know about them in the world that they were growing up in. Yoofi subverts the curriculum she was supposed to be delivering to add in the missing religions from the East, but this only had an impact on her planning and that of her NQT.

There are different concerns within these four schools. For Jacob and Yoofi White British pupils, who predominate in the school population, needed to know about people different from themselves so as to be tolerant. For John and Juwayriyah there was a need to know about the other, but in addition, some pupils needed to be able to see themselves within the curriculum. For Juwayriyah this was achieved through the school SACRE, for John his identification of ethnic groups with specific religious needs. Although Juwayriyah was less explicit about this, another aim of RE was to enable pupils to see their traditions valued by the school. In all four cases religion is more broadly identified with ethnicity and as a consequence there is a secularising of White British pupils and a sacralising of Black and Minority Ethnic pupils. This was not surprising, as this has been a feature of a particular British view of religion as evidenced by Modood, Berthoud et al (1997) and Levey and Modood (2009). Teaching about 'religion' appeared to be preparing pupils to engage with people of 'race' and not necessarily people of religion. Whilst this belief was not clearly

articulated, it emerged from a close reading of the interview transcripts, which was surprising given that three of these teachers were first generation British from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

For these four teachers, their plans were underpinned by the belief that learning about a number of religions leads to tolerance, although there is no evidence to show that this is the case (Eagll in Stoddard and Martin 2017). This led me to conclude that there is a form of social instrumentalism at work in the planning of these teachers and that they are aiming at what Locke described as ‘charitable civility’ (Bejan 2017). This was true even when it was not possible for the teacher to deliver what they believed to be of supreme value because of the greater demands of the school.

For none of these four teachers was there a sense that learning about a religion is something that is simply good for its own sake, the sense that there is something fascinating here to be explored to educate the pupil (Kueh 2014). There is no sense of what Said (1978) described as ‘orientalism’ in the planning of RE in any of these schools. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism were as British as Christianity and in no way a curiosity. Rather, all of these religions deserved study in some form as they are ‘here’.

The aim and purpose of RE, a non-British educated teacher

Kevin stood out from the other four teachers. He never talked about or referenced tolerance in association with RE. For Kevin RE was about tackling the big questions that face each of us as a humans. He took a stance similar to Andrew Wright in his *Critical RE* (2007) without referencing Critical Realist approaches to RE. Kevin did reference Wright specifically because he had attended a course organised by the latter.

Kevin acknowledged that the curriculum he planned was incoherent in terms of knowledge acquisition, but it made sense to him as a way of engaging pupils with significant questions and giving them the skills to work through significant existential questions. Where he sought to broaden the curriculum out, it was focussed on learning how different religions give answers to existential questions not as a way of developing a civic virtue. There was no sense in Kevin’s account of his curriculum that different religions might be asking fundamentally different questions from each

other (Neusner 1991). Nevertheless, as a result of his desire to promote existential questions he introduces topics that normally would be part of the A Level curriculum, especially in the P4C sessions. It is here that those big questions can be approached in the most mature and informed way.

It is of note that whilst John and Kevin taught together for part of their careers, teach in Anglican schools and trained as SIAMS inspectors, their construction of the aims and purposes for RE appears to be different. Their different constructions of the aims and purposes of RE were not necessarily contradictory. It is possible to hold a position that RE aims to deal with big questions and to instil tolerance in pupils. What was clear, though, was that neither Kevin nor John encroached on each other's definition of the aims and purposes of RE.

Theology and Religious Studies, the academic approach and text

There are other aims and purposes for RE that are shared but which were less prominent. Both Kevin and Juwayriyah see the pinnacle of RE as A Level Religious Studies, for them academic excellence is the ultimate aim of RE. However, this would indicate that the purpose of RE changes for them relative to the phase of education that pupils are in. This change is less profound in Kevin, in part because A Level fits more closely with his desire for pupils to encounter existential questions, but more profound for Juwayriyah. She spends much of her energy ensuring that A Level is viable in the absence of GCSE RS or Year 9 RE, both of which she was trying to remedy. There was a clear desire on the part of Juwayriyah to make KS3 RE more academic but it was the context that she found herself in that made this difficult.

Do teachers' construct of aims and purposes for RE shape the curriculum?

The evidence pointed to the conclusion that a teacher's construct of the aims and purposes of RE does have an impact on planning RE at KS3 as a whole. The impact on Year 8 is more difficult to assess. For Jacob and Juwayriyah, there is a model whereby Year 8 progresses from Year 7, where Abrahamic religions are taught in the first year and progress to Dharmic religions in the second. For John and Yoofi this was more problematic as their shared circumstance meant that it was necessary for pupils to be GCSE ready. Nevertheless, the adaptation of John and the subversion of

Yoofi led to curriculum change that reflected their commitment to a particular aim for RE, for John at Year 7 and 8 and for Yoofi at Year 8 specifically.

For Kevin the picture is more complex. The patchwork approach that had developed was less important to him than the overall purpose of RE, which was supported by P4C. Where he delivered content, it was also clear that this was steered to the purpose of his overriding aim of developing a skill base that prepared pupils for A Level.

In all cases what shaped their ability to articulate their vision for RE through the curriculum were the cluster of circumstances that surrounded them.

Cluster of Circumstances

The 'cluster of circumstances' form the unique context for each teacher, however there are commonalities that can be identified as all of these schools form part of a larger school system (Archer 1979). In this section I shall focus on three of these: scrutiny, accountability and resources.

Scrutiny

Since the late 1980s, education has taken on the characteristics of a neo-liberal democracy, which itself has a specific educative programme (Reay and Crozier 2011). Ball has defined three policy ways that have been used to organise policy systems in a neo-liberal society: market, management/managerialism and performance/performativity (Ball 2003, 2006 and 2013). The influence of Ofsted and the publication of accountability measure statistics for schools have put teachers under particular pressure to conform to government targets for education (Bangs, McBeath and Galton 2010).

Jones and Tymms (2014) conclude that there is conflicting evidence that Ofsted has had a positive impact on schools, despite the narrative of Ofsted itself, and that more research needs to be done on its impact on school effectiveness. However, it is clear that Ofsted has accelerated managerialism in schools (Bangs, MacBeath and Galton 2011). Scrutiny works in a number of ways in secondary schools. Case, Case and Catling (2000) looked at the impact that Ofsted inspections were having on schools

and noted the growing culture of managerialism and how that had an impact of what teachers did in their classrooms. Hall and Noyes (2009) explored how teachers' identities were changing as a result of the impact of Ofsted and how that was having an impact on schools in England. There is also a body of school improvement literature, which has been generated from the need to respond to the managerial agenda that was promoted by the government from 1997 onwards (Brighouse and Woods 1999; Bangs, MacBeath and Galton 2011).

For the five schools in this study scrutiny works in different ways. Schools that have 'good' results as published by the DfE have freedom from inspection, which means they are not being scrutinised by Ofsted. Schools that have a history of 'poor' performance in terms of the accountability measures set by government, and issues such as floor targets, have increased scrutiny. Whilst this scrutiny is not of RE as a curriculum subject per se it has an impact on the whole school, which has to be seen to be improving the overall results of the school and freeing it from government scrutiny.

Two schools in this study are subject to Section 48 inspections, which are organised by the governing body, in light of the school's religious foundation. Whilst individual subject inspection as part of Section 5 inspections was dropped in the early 2000s, and subject survey inspections led by HMI came to an end in 2014, schools with a religious foundation have continued to have religious education inspected. For both of these schools SIAMS worked as a validating mechanism for the RE curriculum offer. As both John and Kevin were in the senior leadership team in their respective schools, there was a level of trust on the part of their respective governing bodies, according to both John and Kevin. SIAMS validated the position held by both governing bodies that the RE being delivered was conforming to their responsibility to provide Anglican RE, and acted as an additional external source to inform their opinion.

There was another form of scrutiny in John's school, which was informal but no less real, and to some extent external. John wanted to add more religions to the RE offer but was critically aware of the presence of a substantial number of Nigerian Christian parents who have a particular view of the RE content their children should learn. As the school is relatively small in terms of pupil numbers, John was aware that if

parents were to move their children to another Anglican school to get ‘better’ RE this would have a negative impact on a school, which was already experiencing more intense scrutiny from Ofsted.

For Juwayriyah and Jacob there was no pressure from the governors or the senior leadership team to have their RE scrutinised as their schools results were not causing concern and they are not under threat of Ofsted inspection. For Juwayriyah and Jacob there was no challenge to their curriculum offer. They both held that being an academy gave them the freedom to do what they think is best for their pupils, and this was true of Kevin. Interestingly, though, there was no internal scrutiny in their schools. Both schools publically stated that they followed the locally agreed syllabus to fulfil their funding agreement and in neither case was this true. Jacob’s school website even referred to visits made to local places of worship that did not happen and had not happened in Jacob’s memory, which pre-dates the school’s website. The key for Jacob and Kevin was the contribution that GCSE RS made to each school’s Progress 8 measure; for Juwayriyah, the contribution to A Level results. Neither Jacob nor Juwayriyah had undergone any curriculum scrutiny at Key Stage 3, and neither school bought in external consultancy to check the quality of curriculum in RE.

For John and Yoofi, though, there was a very different context. Both schools had been given ‘Notice to Improve’ by Ofsted and this had led to a focus on RE’s contribution to Progress 8. Whilst John’s RE curriculum covered what would be expected for Christianity in a school with a Christian foundation the only other religion that was taught with any depth was Islam. This was to support pupils’ knowledge needed for the GCSE specification that they follow. This was also true for Yoofi as the published programme for RE at Key Stage 3 was almost wholly the teaching of Christianity and Islam to prepare pupils for GCSE. In fifteen years Yoofi’s school has had thirteen visits from Ofsted, either full inspections or monitoring visits.

For all that, there was not close curriculum scrutiny in Yoofi’s school, which allowed her to subvert what is expected of her. Yoofi simply ignored what the school published and taught a parallel curriculum, as did her NQT. All of the other teachers in the department taught what the school has published on its website. As one of the

other teachers was a member of the Senior Leadership Team, Yoofi did not share her innovations with the whole team. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that for Yoofi the lack of scrutiny led to the opportunity to provide something more in keeping with her aims and purposes of RE than the overriding concern of the school.

The power of scrutiny and the managerialism that has fostered it, has had a differential impact on the teachers in this study. For three it has had little or no impact for two, a significant impact, but not in a direct way. Where it had an impact, though, there were clear signs of resistance and rebellion in terms of what teachers believed to be important. There is though a caveat. In all of these schools there is scrutiny of pupil progress data but not a scrutiny of the curriculum as planned and/or delivered. There is no sense that the curriculum itself is connected to progress, rather it is something epiphenomenal as progress is constructed relative to a skill set not connected to curriculum content.

Accountability

Brill, Grayson, Kuhn and O'Donnell (2018) undertook a literature review of accountability systems and their impact on standards and engagement in education. Their findings indicated that where there are high stakes accountability systems, some subjects are prioritised over others. *The State of the Nation Report* (NATRE 2017) indicates that secondary schools are marginalising religious education at Key Stage 4, as the curriculum is narrowed to optimise pupil performance in public examinations. The Commission for RE (2017:8) picked up on this in their final report:

‘An increasing number of schools, particularly academies, offer no provision for RE at Key Stages 3 and 4. In 2016, 33.4% of all schools did not offer any RE at Key Stage 4 and 23.1% did not offer any RE at Key Stage 3. This represents nearly 900 schools offering no RE at Key Stage 4, and a significant increase from 22.1% (nearly 600 schools) in 2015.’

It goes on to state:

‘Changes to accountability systems have created an environment where there is less and less incentive for schools to offer good RE, particularly at secondary level. These

include Ofsted no longer inspecting individual subjects, the removal of GCSE Short Courses from school performance measures and the non-inclusion of Religious Studies GCSE in the Ebacc. This has led to a significant drop in students taking a Key Stage 4 qualification in RE and has affected, for example, the number of specialist teachers at secondary level. (Op.Cit pp. 9 – 10)’

As the five schools in this study do not represent a valid sample of secondary schools, but schools were chosen because they did deliver RE at Key Stage 3, it is not to be expected that they match the pattern reported in the Commission on RE’s final report. It was the case, though, that GCSE Religious Studies is an option in one school and that no candidates had been entered for it during the time that the teacher had been there. When she arrived at the school, Juwayriyah was faced with a situation where GCSE RS and Key Stage 3 RE had been effectively eliminated from the curriculum, the latter being delivered through tutor time and not monitored. At the time of the research she was working hard to establish a GCSE RS group in the school but the entitlement to RE at Key Stage 4 was not evident. What Juwayriyah was able to do was to reinstate RE as a discrete curriculum subject within the Humanities faculty, even though that was not why she was appointed. Her school was the only school in this study where RE had been removed from the curriculum at any key stage as a way of improving pupils’, and therefore the school’s, results.

As noted in the section on Scrutiny the only two schools that have had issues with accountability measures were those that have had increased scrutiny and that scrutiny had an impact on curriculum planning and design. These schools tried to ensure that they had covered some of the knowledge and understanding needed to do well in the new GCSE specifications (DfE 2015). As the knowledge required was more extensive and sophisticated than previously expected, it was felt that it could not be delivered in Key Stage 4, as less time was given to GCSE RS than EBacc subjects. This recognition was also having an impact on Jacob’s as he thought about the future of RE.

Therefore, in terms of the research design for these five schools, accountability measures were less important than scrutiny, but they were inextricably linked. Murphy (2018) explored the relationship between greater scrutiny in schools and the

increasing bureaucracy of educational accountability, but this did not include the scrutiny of curriculum and teacher's accountability for it. This reflects Ofsted's move in the early 2000s from looking at curriculum to increasingly looking at performance. As curriculum is not directly linked to performance, a school's accountability is removed from considerations about curriculum. This was compounded by government change in England, heralded by *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) and the *Case For Change* (DfE 2010a) where curriculum and assessment were disambiguated. The GCSE reforms (UK Parliament 2017) were part of the desire to make attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 more academic, with more demanding content (DfE 2010). The impact on Religious Studies was for the government to write the content that had to be used in GCSE specifications (DfE 2015), with further guidance published for schools, local authorities and Agreed Syllabus Conferences about the Religious Studies GCSE and the Religious Education curriculum (DfE 2016). This came along with changes to the grading system from A* - G to 1 – 9 which was seen to underpin a more rigorous approach to GCSEs as a whole²⁰.

Where the new accountability measures were having an impact on those schools putting in candidates for GCSE RS was in how pupils were assessed in RE at Key Stage 3. All four schools in this study that offered GCSE RS, not simply as a choice but as an expected part of KS4, had started using the 1 – 9 level grading system from Year 7. In the absence of levels, they adapted the levels to measure pupil progress but, with the exception of John's and Yoofi's schools, there was no direct impact at the time of the research on the design of the curriculum.

Resources

Materials used to Teach about World Religions in Schools in England (DCSF 2010) looked at how schools used resources from printed materials and websites as resources to both inform and support the planning and teaching of RE. Below, I look at some of their findings from the over six hundred plus schools involved to analyse how the five schools use resources for planning purposes. I also look at time and staff as resources, both identified as issues by NATRE (2017).

²⁰ See: <https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2018/03/02/gcse-9-to-1-grades-a-brief-guide-for-parents/>

Books and websites

Jackson et al (DCSF 2010) found that where teachers drew on books and websites to inform their planning and delivery of RE pupils were most positive about the books they used at Key Stages 1 – 3. All of the teachers in the five schools in this study had access to single copies of textbooks to inform their planning but there was no evidence that textbooks were used for the purpose of curriculum planning. None of these schools used textbooks with their pupils, although Kevin used texts as a focus for learning in Year 7. The process common to all of these schools was to create the curriculum model and then to find resources that could be put onto PowerPoint slides for presentations to pupils, although teachers had freedom in how to use the resources. There was no scrutiny of the way resources were used by staff members; rather it was the assessment that was key, as all schools had periodic common assessments.

There was no sense, as recommended by Jackson et al (Op.Cit), that websites needed to be checked for their reliability. There were some commonly used websites, such as RE Online, as trusted sources. Often the books were used to help non-specialist teachers understand the topics being covered and Jacob had developed a file which contained all of the materials needed for the non-specialist, which had been checked by a specialist RE teacher from within the school.

CooperGibson Research (DfE 2018:7) noted that secondary schools reported:

‘Textbooks/key texts were used as a framework for teaching and planning (rather than working through them systematically during lessons), as they wanted to ensure that all lesson content was linked tightly to exam specifications.’

And that:

‘At secondary level, this also meant that schools could create resources that established a foundation for content required at KS4 that could be developed at KS3. (Op.Cit p8)’

This was the case for John and Yoofi, as they had a need to ensure the GCSE readiness of their pupils, but it was not the case for the others. If anything Jacob and Kevin saw KS3 as a place not to prepare pupils for GCSE as there were more important educational considerations, Yoofi and John were moving in that direction. For Juwayriyah this was not an issue as there were no GCSE groups in the school.

It is reasonable to conclude that resources were not shaping the curriculum offer in any of these schools as teachers themselves were creators of those resources. The only voice of dissent was Kevin, who wanted a resourced scheme of work for the department to adopt. To what extent he and his staff would implement such a scheme of work could not be tested, in that they had not used the resource as it had been intended and for which they had been trained to deliver.

Faith communities and religious demography

Jackson et al (2010) note the percentage of schools that reported the involvement of faith communities in supporting classroom RE. Support from Christian communities was the most common, followed by Muslim communities. They also note the importance of visiting places of worship as a key form of encounter for pupils in religious education.

In none of the five schools in this study was there evidence that pupils met people from religious communities, either as visitors or during visits to places of worship. There was a desire for this to happen in Yoofi's case and a commitment to this by the school in Jacob's case. In neither case did this happen.

Jackson et al's report (Op.Cit:130) noted that:

‘... schools, their geographical location and demographic context means that there is a diversity of faith profiles in the sample which also have an impact on religious education curriculum choices and delivery.’

There was only one example of where this was evident, which was in John's curriculum choices. He had made, and was planning to make, specific changes to the school's curriculum offer on the basis of the changing demography of his school and

the area around it. For the others there was no attempt to respond to local demographic factors. This was compounded by there being little in the way of curriculum resourcing about the local religious make up and its different levels of diversity. When Jacob was asked about Christianity in the area where his school was situated, he could only talk about the Baptist church, which he had previously encountered, and some of whose members had come into the school to support part of the RE curriculum when he first taught there. Jacob was unaware of the large East European and Mediterranean Orthodox Christian presence in the area, the Anglican parishes, Methodist chapels or even the Hindu temple. Only one teacher lived within the catchment area of their school, Juwayriyah, and she never alluded to the Muslim community centre where she lived or the Buddhist centre near the school.

Locally Agreed Syllabuses, local advisors and diocesan syllabuses

All of the teachers talked about the locally agreed syllabus but there was no evidence that it had informed their planning, especially with consideration to the local religious demography. Jackson et al (2010) reported that only 9% of secondary schools chose materials for RE based on the recommendation of the locally agreed syllabus and that only 49% of their sample followed such a syllabus. Ofsted (1997) found that standards at Key Stage 3 were below expectation because secondary schools did not follow the local requirement.

What is of significance here is that three of the five teachers were on the local SACRE when the research was undertaken, Jacob, John and Juwayriyah, and Yoofi had been seen by the local authority advisor who supported her when taking up the post. The same adviser had also worked with Jacob when the school had had a negative HMI subject inspection on RE. The HMI report clearly instructs the school to follow the locally agreed syllabus, which it did not.

Of the two schools that had to follow the locally agreed syllabus before academisation both stated that they continued to do so but there was no evidence that they did in practice. The one school still required to teach the agreed syllabus clearly did not. Both schools with a religious foundation claimed that they had taken into account the locally agreed syllabuses and their own diocesan syllabuses but there was no evidence that that was the case. In relation to the respective diocesan syllabuses neither, on

investigation, had a requirement at Key Stage 3. This was curious as both Kevin and John talked about it and both were inspectors of RE for their respective dioceses. It can only be presumed that they were referring to a previous document still used in their schools but not produced during the research.

Time

NATRE (2017:5) reported that:

‘28% of secondary schools told the Department for Education that they gave no dedicated curriculum time to RE.’

and that:

‘Schools following a locally agreed syllabus for RE tend to have higher levels of provision than academies, but lower than schools of a religious character. (Op.Cit p6)’

All of the teachers in this study stated that they had time to deliver RE. Juwayriyah had one hour per week per pupil at Key Stage 3, as did Yoofi. Jacob has 50 minutes per week. As expected schools with a religious foundation have more curriculum time for RE with John having 100 minutes per week and Kevin 150 minutes over two weeks. Hence, it is possible to conclude that the schools in this study are not typical in terms of the national picture in 2017 (Op.Cit).

CooperGibson Research on behalf of government (DfE 2018:22) reported that:

‘In secondary schools, schemes of work were developed for all subjects, typically by year group, and these were used as the basis for lesson planning across the academic year. The mapping process was typically led by Heads of Department. The role of senior leaders was generally to oversee this process, rather than lead it themselves. However, both senior leaders and teachers viewed this plan as a curriculum resource because it provided a strategic overview of the requirements for teaching that needed to be met over a period of time (term/year).’

In no sense were the three non-denominational schools in this study ‘typical’ in terms of the picture painted above. It was more representative of the denominational schools, as they had to prepare for SIAMS inspections. In fact, there was no evidence of senior leadership involvement in the oversight of RE at Key Stage 3 in the non-denominational schools and no scrutiny, as noted above, as to whether the curriculum plan actually delivered the school’s own public commitments to RE.

CooperGibson Research went on to note:

‘Some secondary schools described ‘working backwards’ from GCSE and A Level exam specifications to map the curriculum and schemes of work across all year groups right down to Year 7. This was based on the view that Year 7 is the ‘first year’ of GCSEs and that planning based on exam specifications ensured that pupils were always working towards the objectives and standards required for GCSEs.’ (Op.Cit)

This was true for John and Yoofi and featured in the narratives of Jacob and Kevin, in the form of GCSE inflected assessments if not curriculum content planning directly.

Staff available to teach RE

NATRE (2017) highlighted the number of non-specialist teachers delivering RE in non-denominational secondary schools. It noted that more than twice as many non-specialist teachers were delivering RE than similar teachers delivering History.²¹ In denominational schools the picture was much better, as this research bears out.

However, the impact on the curriculum offer itself of having non-specialist teacher delivering RE was not something looked at in the NATRE report. It was clear from my research that where a teacher was a specialist, the way that they developed curriculum for KS3 was to meet the needs of staff, not just of pupils. Juwayriyah was clear that if she had taught KS3 RE it would have been different, with an emphasis on text. There was also evidence of this in Yoofi’s planning. She was clear that she would not expect the teachers who had been there before her to implement the curriculum changes she had initiated for herself and her NQT, who was RE trained,

²¹ Non-specialist defined as someone not having a post A Level qualification in the subject. (NATRE 2017: 29)

although this was in part due to wanting to teach something other than what had been agreed. Jacob, as a non-specialist, which he saw to be a strength, had been informed by a specialist in the design of the content for the programme of study which was to be delivered by non-specialists and this was clear in the mid-term plans. There was no expectation that teachers would have any in depth knowledge or understanding of what they were teaching. This explains why he referred to the religiously focussed units as ‘introductions to ...’.

It is worth comparing John and Kevin’s planning with that of Juwayriyah. All three have degrees in Theology or Religious Studies, both Kevin and Juwayriyah teach A Level, but the curriculum offer they provide is wholly different. John and Kevin worked in a context where their teams were specialist and Juwayriyah in a school where she is the only specialist. Her aspirations for pupils were hampered by the teachers delivering RE and indicated that if she had delivered RE at KS3, it would have been different. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that their planning as a whole reflected the strengths and the needs of the teaching staff available to deliver the subject.

Does the cluster of circumstances have an impact on planning in RE?

The cluster of circumstances had a differential impact on curriculum planning. The most notable circumstance was the number of non-specialist teachers expected to deliver the subject. It was not possible to make a judgement about curriculum time, as all of these teachers stated that they had sufficient time to deliver the programme of study. None of the schools drew upon textbooks or other resources in a way that would have an impact on planning, and this was as true for local faith communities as resources and agreed syllabuses.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to return to look at the repertoires of action framework developed to understand teachers planning in light of teacher’s histories, beliefs and values, and the cluster of circumstances that underpin the repertoires of action research methodology being used in this study.

I divided the three areas into six themes, which were placed in a broader framework. For each theme I set out the broader context on the basis of the literature. Limiting

myself to these themes may mean that I have overlooked something, such as local context – although this was touched upon in each case study and in the section above about agreed syllabuses as a resource for planning.

These schools are not necessarily representative and in some ways do not appear as typical when compared with the NATRE (2017) report, although there were some similarities in some areas. What is not clear is why teachers actually did make specific choices in the way that they did, in terms of the influences that were investigated. That Jacob and Juwayriyah produced an almost identical programme of study with their different backgrounds and contexts is not accounted for in the story that they tell, the curriculum that the school is committed to or the resources that they have available. It is more obvious to see why John and Yoofi produce what they do because of the pressures of the relationship between accountability measures and scrutiny.

The most common driver in this group of five – or the most significant theme – is what teachers believe about the purpose of RE and its importance for their pupils. This explained agency in each of the case studies far more cogently, when agency can be exercised, than any other theme. There is a balance, though, because it is clear that teachers' academic and professional backgrounds have an influence in the case of John and Kevin, but that is also because they are in schools that esteem the knowledge base that they have. In Juwayriyah's case this only comes to the fore at 6th Form, which is her real passion. For Jacob, his commitment to a form of multicultural representationalism (Thomassen 2017; Levey and Modood 2009), with the belief that no one religion should be placed over another, is his narrative about the way that his curriculum was developed. John and Yoofi are both also in the act of subversion and this again comes back to their view of the purpose of RE in a context that allows them to subvert. Hence it is not possible to divorce the agentic act from the context (Preistley, Biesta and Robinson 2015), this also true for Jacob.

Therefore, in terms of planning, there are spaces created by context, which can be experienced positively or negatively by the teacher, but I am making no judgement on that. It is clear that teachers in this study have a vision for RE which drives what they do. This is shaped by the school they are in and the context in which it finds

itself and its priorities. Having to produce resources for non-specialist teachers involves decisions about what is possible; being under scrutiny because of inspection informs decisions about what is not only possible, but also desirable.

In terms of the task I set myself, to see whether a repertoires of action informed methodology was appropriate for investigating teachers planning of RE in Year 8 I would suggest it is. Whilst these five teachers do not make a representative sample, the areas of concern set out in repertoires of action research are useful. The approach allows for a framing an approach that leads to analysis and allowed me to have a clear line from what might be expected from the literature to what the case studies actually revealed.

In the next chapter I return to the theoretical base of Archer (1995) to consider how it is possible to have a broader framework for analysis that might offer a fuller understanding of how teachers make curriculum plans for RE in Key Stage 3.

Chapter 7: RE teachers as decision makers in relation to the Cultural System

Introduction

In this chapter I offer a second level of analysis of the curriculum choices of five secondary school teachers in England in the second decade of the 21st century. In this chapter I argue that it is possible to understand those choices, not only in terms of the data that came from the case studies directly, but also, in light of the historical and cultural contexts that these teachers find themselves in. It is my argument that the planning of the teachers in this study reveals social processes that are embedded within each teacher's concept of their world. Given that this research was under during the two years of the Commission on Religious Education's investigation and two reports (REC 2017; 2018), I also include an analysis of the Final Report in light of the analytical framework that I am applying to these teachers. This is important because the Commission represents a stage in the development of RE in England.

In the research design there was a built-in a second level of analysis, where the data would be reviewed in light of the theoretical base for the research. This was more than adopting the epistemological view of Critical Realism (Patomäki and Wight 2000) but also adopting the position that there are underlying social structures at work, of which people may be unaware (Archer et al 1998). In this chapter I started by identifying by identifying five areas that I believed needed to be taken into consideration when analysing the data from the multiple case studies, as presented. These were:

- the return of religion to the public space and why it had become significant once more in terms of public discourse
- the multicultural nature of British society and the conflation of religion with ethnicity
- theories of secularisation and de-secularisation
- schools as mediating institutions
- literature around tolerance

These five areas were then reduced to four in light of re-reading the case studies, which were:

- religion in the public space
- societal and teacher anxiety
- social virtue
- the fifth teacher.

It is these four areas that helped me to better understand teachers' curriculum choices in wake of the multiple case study analysis; these are presented immediately below. I will then go on to undertake an analysis of the data as a whole informed by Archer's (1995) socio-morphogenetic approach.

Religion in the public space

Whilst religious education and the teaching of religion in schools has been a contested space since 1870 (Astley et al 2018; Miller et al 2013), the place of religion in the 'public square' has in some ways become less so (Woodhead and Catto 2012). The financial crisis of the early part of the 21st century saw a reduction of the state and some of its traditional areas of activity significantly diminished. This can be seen in research such as *Public Faith and Finance*²² that looked at how faith communities, including those considered minority faiths, had responded to growing austerity in the UK. This resurgence of the importance of religion in the public space was disconcerting for some and research was published calling for and defining the need for religious literacy (Dinham and Francis 2015). Along with this, there were calls for greater understanding of the place of theology in the public space (Pirner et al 2018). It also became evident that religion had continued to be significant at a social and institutional level even though it appeared to leave public discourse (Barker 2010; Torrey 2016) and that was why faith communities were in a position to respond to the financial crisis (Woodhead and Catto 2012).

Recognising the persistent paradox that is religion in Britain (Davie 2015) meant relooking at what teachers had done in their planning. That RE was in a strong position in the schools in this study, although for one that was a recent phenomenon,

²² <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/research/impact/faith-and-finance/>

indicated that religion was seen to be important by these schools. At first it was not apparent why that should be the case, given the research on secondary RE in England (NATRE 2017), although Goodhew and Cooper (2019) gave some indication as to why that might be in that four of the five schools, which were situated in Greater London. Goodhew and Cooper argue that religion in Greater London is a more important feature of peoples' lives than in other areas of the UK, proposing that there is a form of de-secularisation in process in the capital.

The narrative that has surrounded the secularisation debate in England, and more widely across the UK, is not a simple narrative. The definition and nature of what constitutes 'the secular space' is contested (Davie 2015; Dinham and Francis 2015; Goodhew and Cooper 2019). It is clear that 'the secular' and secularisation mean different things in different contexts. This has a direct impact on my analysis in terms of cultural structure and how the idea of the secular can be used as a category for analysing RE in these five schools.

Societal and teacher anxiety

One of the themes that arose consistently in the research was the importance of the concept of tolerance, as important for pupils and as a driver for RE. This surprised me as I was expecting to hear more about the importance of respect, as seen in the CoRE report (2018). Sociological research also underlined the issues surrounding the increasing diversity of British, especially English, societies. It was clear from the REDCo project that increasing diversity was a feature of 21st century Europe and that issues of citizenship were key to this. It was clear from my further reading of the REDCo research that these issues were not simply pan-European but that they were framed differently in different nations. As a result of this, I extended my reading, after the multiple case study analysis had taken place, to look at how this issue had been conceptualised in the UK. Modood et al (1997), Modood (2008), Levey and Modood (2009) had explored the conceptualisation and the practice of multiculturalism in the UK, especially immigration and what they termed 'the new religious pluralism' (Levey and Modood 2009:139 – 163). This was important in my analysis as it enabled me to see how teachers were making religion an ethnic marker in some schools. Religion in many cases had become a proxy for race and ethnicity. This though did not necessarily help me understand the underlying concerns that were driving

curriculum design. Here I found the work of Thomassen (2017) useful. His concept of representational multiculturalism was key to helping me re-contextualise both teachers' planning and how some teachers thought about the curriculum direction that they wanted their school to take.

In terms of secularisation theory the importance of defining the secular becomes increasingly important and the way that the secular interacts with religion, ethnicity and race in the minds of teachers is important area of research in itself.

Social virtue

Increasingly through the research with teachers, there was one social virtue that predominated, as noted above. Tolerance was the key for four of the teachers in this study but it was based on a very specific model of tolerance. To locate which model was being used, I turned to Bejan (2017). Her work identified three models of tolerance from three classic early modern thinkers: Hobbs, Locke and Williams. It occurred to me on the basis of the transcripts that Locke's version of civil charity was the dominant model, based on the idea that learning about someone would lead to understanding them and thereby tolerating them, leading to an exercise of civil charity. Whether learning about someone of difference automatically leads to tolerance is both unproven and disputed, but it was operative in teachers' narratives and how they went on to plan their curricula, in four cases.

The fifth teacher

The 'fifth teacher' was a conundrum, in that whilst he had taught RE in England for his entire teaching career and had taught in a different school with one other teacher in this study, his narrative about RE was markedly different. I reviewed the diversity of approaches to RE as identified by Grimmitt (2000), which proved useful but not crucial. The one thing that separated this teacher from the others was that he had not been socialised or educated in England but rather in Ireland. To try to understand better his approach to curriculum, I decided to look at current debates in Irish and Roman Catholic religious education. For the former I looked particularly at Shanahan (2017) and the latter Whittle (2015; 2018). In line with my earlier thinking it made sense to culturally situate a teacher in order to understand that teacher's actions. This proved useful and I recognised that more work would need to be done to establish a more coherent evidence based theory. It was clear that this teacher was in almost

every respect culturally different to the others, even though three of the others were first generation British.

With these further considerations taken I move onto the theoretical framework, which builds on that presented in the Methodology chapter.

The theoretical framework

In the research methodology I take Critical Realism as my research paradigm rooted in the writing of Archer et al (1998). Archer (1998) argues that it is possible to talk about cultural systems as real without collapsing those systems into the socio-cultural relationships that happen between people in their everyday lives. Cultural systems exist at the level of ideas/logic whilst the socio-cultural exists at the level of relationships. Archer (Op.Cit) maintains that it is possible to talk about a cultural system and its features as real, in a way that does not depend upon constant reference to the socio-cultural level of peoples' lives. The distinction she makes allows the social scientist to examine the socio-cultural in relation to the cultural system without confusing these different features of a society.

The socio-cultural level is not a single set of interactions but a diverse and complex series of overlapping interactions, characterised not by logic but by relationships. The socio-cultural level does have an impact on the cultural system overtime, as all cultural systems are more or less dynamic. In this analysis, I take Archer's position that the cultural system is real and has an impact on the actors at the socio-cultural level even when they are not aware of those influences.

The socio-morphogenetic sequence presented by Archer (1995) can be viewed as three stages:

T¹ Structural conditioning

T² Socio-cultural interaction T³

Structural elaboration (morphogenesis)

Structural reproduction (morphostasis) T⁴

Below, I analyse the data presented in the case studies to examine the impact of structural conditioning (T^1) on teachers' curriculum choices ($T^2 - T^3$). I then look at how the choices teachers themselves made involved 'enabling conversations', which enabled the possibility of structural elaboration (T^4). Conversations that lead to the establishment of a new system for religious education in England, here represented by the CoRE reports (2017; 2018), or lead to further structural stasis (T^4).

I aim to identify which features of the cultural system are having an impact on the way teachers plan their own curriculum in religious education. To do this I identify three specific aspects of the cultural system: the institutions, ideas and social processes of England that shed light on the curriculum decisions of these five teachers, something that they may not immediately recognise themselves. I also look at the one teacher who differs from the others and suggest that a different cultural system applies to him, as an internalised field of meaning that sheds light on his curriculum decisions.

Firstly, I take it as read that education is a negotiated space in England and that it is a decentralised system (Archer 1979). Whilst Archer (2013) notes the significant change to the situation she initially described in 1979, as a result of the 1988 Education Reform Act, the system for deciding on content for religious education had not changed. Further, the expansion of the Academies programme in England since 2010 has in some ways further decentralised the curriculum by giving schools that are Academies or Free Schools the right to develop their own curriculum. One sign of the government's desire to decentralise curriculum was to close down the QCDA (formally the QCA) in 2011, transferring its powers to other government agencies. Unlike Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland there is no specific curriculum body for England.

The second feature is the growth in government of neo-liberalism as a philosophy of the relationship between the state and society and its impact on education (Ball 2003; 2006; 2013; Reay, Crozier and James 2011).

Secularisation is the third feature of Britain's cultural structure that I will consider, as part of a broader European cultural system. Whilst the definition and reality of

secularisation continues to be contested (for example Hunter 2017 in the context of the United States), significant changes in British society have led to the idea that the process of secularisation is part of its cultural system (Brown 2009; MacLeod 2010). Whilst the United Kingdom is not a secular state per se, the de facto position has been that 'religion' does not play a significant role in the political and civic life of the nation. This is not to claim that religion itself is not significant at the socio-cultural level (Woodhead and Catto 2012). I also consider whether the analysis here has to be understood in the context of London specifically (Goodhew and Cooper 2019)

Finally, I consider the changing nature of society since the 1950s that identifies Britain as multicultural and the recognition of this in terms of political and social discourse (Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain 2002; Levey and Modood 2009; Modood 2008; Pathak 2000; 2008) and how the multicultural nature of society draws on a relational feature of the cultural system: tolerance.

In terms of the logic of these ideas in relation to the cultural system I propose the following :

- both classical liberalism and neo-liberalism hold that the market is the best mechanism for organising not only the economy but also human affairs. To this extent government has a minimal role and has a responsibility to decentralise power (Birch 2018; cf. Woodhead and Catto 2012 in relation to religion and belief)
- decentralisation as a policy leads to schools being encouraged or designed to be 'free' of government control, even at local level. Teachers should be able to design their own curricula as professionals. This also leads to a political tension between the need to trust professionals to do what they should and the need to ensure they are doing what they should. This tension leads to anxiety, which in turn leads to regulation, inspection and targets that allow the market to work as schools are held accountable (Bangs, MacBeath and Galton 2010)
- classical and neo-liberalism also holds to the free movement of capital, goods and people. The need for people to feed the economy both as producers and consumers is a prelude for more diverse societies. There are tensions, though,

about how this will play out, as evidenced when immigration is seen by the electorate and politicians to become problematic (Mishra 2017). Nevertheless, societies become more diverse as globalisation and migration are needed for the markets to work

- this leads to a need to ensure a society can function so that the market itself can work. The result of this is the development of new forms of citizenship that are based around understanding the other and the key civic virtue of tolerance (Bejan 2017; Dawson 2016; Levey and Modood 2009; Thomassen 2017). This is underpinned by the desire for society to be a secular space not one inflected by a specific religion per se.

I explore these ideas (cultural structure) below and relate them to the teachers in this study (socio-cultural interaction) and how the process of social elaboration is evidenced by the work of the Commission on RE.

Teachers as decision makers in the Cultural System

Decentralised education system

To recap: T^1 represents ‘cultural structure’, the ideas that inform a culture. $T^2 - T^3$ represents sociocultural interaction. T^4 represents social elaboration or social stasis, which moves society from the position held at T^1 or affirms the existing cultural structure,

T^1

Archer (1979) argues that the social origin of England’s school system is rooted in the development of England as a nation and that its education system was historically decentralised as the model for schools arose out of a public school system. This decentralisation trope has continued (DfE 2010; 2010a). Currently, in England there is a mix of politics around schools that means that schools are affected by differing legislation and rules. Religious Education, though, has been effectively decentralised since 1870 and the establishment of local authorities in 1944 and the requirement for locally agreed syllabuses did little to change that. There were attempts to have central points of reference over time, such as the *National Model Syllabuses* (SCAA 1994) and the *National Framework for RE* (2004) but these had limited success (Chater and Erricker 2013; Clarke and Woodhead 2015). This issue of decentralisation was

reflected on by Chater and Erricker (2013) as they argued that the system of local determination was leading to a catastrophe for RE. They did not propose a centralised solution to the problem but a further localised system, stating:

‘In this new context, SACREs are an inadequate vehicle, not because they are local but because they are not local enough.’ (Op.Cit 100)

$T^2 - T^3$

Only one school in this study is a maintained local authority school, Lord Elliot at which Yoofi teaches. The other four schools are Academies and have the right to provide the curriculum that they believe to be in the best interests of their pupils. Curriculum decision-making in religious education is bounded by certain conditions, even for academies. For the schools without a religious foundation, RE is dependent on the definition of religious education in the 1996 Education Act, as it appears in the 1988 Education Reform Act. Here religious education must ‘reflect that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain’ (DCSF 2010:10)..

In a decentralised curriculum it would be expected that there would be diversity in curriculum design that would itself be accepted in terms of the overall cultural system, within the broad definition given to the subject. The success of the curriculum design could not be judged in each case at Key Stage 3 as there is no clear mechanism for doing this and there is no national benchmark against which to judge success until Key Stage 4. Decentralisation does help to account for the diversity of curriculum designs in the five case studies with teachers being given the authority to design those curricula.

Decentralisation also accounts for teachers’ own experience at school, university and during initial teacher education. There is no sense from the interviews that they shared a common experience at secondary school, that their degrees shared a common core of knowledge and understanding even when they did ‘the same degree’ or that their initial teacher education followed a similar pattern (Beck and Young 2005). The latter is compounded by the changing nature of the Teacher Standards (for the latest

iteration at the time of this research see: DfE 2018), as these applied at the time of initial teacher education and through the time teachers spent as Probationary or Newly Qualified Teachers. The Standards are primarily skill based not subject knowledge based. Teachers in England do not have to be qualified²³ in a subject to be able to teach that subject or be the curriculum lead for it. As NATRE (2017) noted, less than half of those teaching RE in Academies have a qualification in Religious Studies or Religious Education, this rising to 58% in maintained non-denominational schools and 77% in schools with a religious foundation. There is also the issue of what would constitute a post-A Level qualification in RE (Hampshire 2013).

The decentralised system has at various times been seen to be problematic. In 1963 the Robbins Report²⁴ recognised the number and diversity of teacher training colleges and sought to bring them under university oversight, ensuring that the Certificate in Education was university accredited. It also sought to 'professionalise' teaching by changing the Certificated teaching system to a degree system whereby a teacher would do a first degree, followed by a second degree in Education as an academic and professional discipline. Teachers were to be given a one-term sabbatical every seven years. Lack of progress led to the James Report²⁵, which set out both a pattern to teacher education and suggestions on the content of the teacher qualification, either as an undergraduate degree or as a Diploma in Higher Education. Effectively, the James Report led to the withdrawal of the Certificate in Education for those wanting to teach in schools but the regulation of these qualifications lay in the hands of universities. The National Council for Teacher Education and Training proposed by James was not formed, further emphasising the decentralised character of England's cultural structure. A further sign of the decentralisation of England's education system is seen in the disbanding of the General Teaching Council England (GTCE), which had a brief history from 2000 to 2012: all the other nations of the UK have a body which regulates teacher and teacher standards (Hampshire in Barnes 2018). When the government disbanded the GTCE it was briefly replaced by the Teaching Agency and then the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), which was dissolved

²³ Qualified here refers to having a post A Level qualification in a subject area (DfE 2018)

²⁴ <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/index.html>

²⁵ <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/james/james1972.html>

in 2018 and was absorbed into the Teacher Regulation Agency, which primarily deals with misconduct and the keeping of a register for teacher status checks.

In order to better see the impact of the decentralised nature of England's cultural system as it manifests itself in education, I shall compare it with another system. As I have drawn upon Afdal (2010) it will be useful to compare the system in England with that in Norway. Andreassen (2013) describes the history of religious education in Norway from 1736 onwards and that it was determined by the state at all stages, religious education was not a legislated part of English education until the 1870 Education Act and that did not include curriculum specifics. In Norway, teacher training is done through a number of routes but there are clear standards for knowledge, skills and competencies for each subject. Whilst this system is diversifying, there is a sense in which RE teachers have special responsibilities in Norway's education system. As in England, the nature of RE is contested (Andreassen 2014), nevertheless Afdal (2010) is able to talk about religious education teachers as a community of practice. They share enough to be thought of as a community, something where a common language is used and where the aims and content of the subject can be articulated as the meeting point between religion and education. Conroy et al (2013) identify one issue that religious education has in the UK as it stands at the interface between religion and education, two life forms with different cultures and methodologies, but there is no sense that the RE teachers in this study form a community of practice.

When looking at the teachers in this study, it is possible to identify four teachers when asking whether RE teachers form a 'community of practice' in England, each of whom is part of some form of network. Firstly, only Yoofi talks about RE teacher networks and that only applied in her previous school. She attended the network not because she identified as a teacher of RE, but because being a non-specialist she needed a sense of what was appropriate and useful in her context. Jacob works in a multi academy trust and as such meets with RE teachers from other schools. These meetings moderate standards and typically occur in a pub. These are more loose networks than communities of practice. The two teachers who have formed something akin to a community of practice are John and Kevin, who taught in the same school and did their SIAMS inspector training together. Despite this, the planning in their

schools is significantly different, not least in the way that they construct the aims and purposes of RE. Therefore decentralisation has had the impact of allowing idiosyncratic planning to develop due to a lack of a central point of reference for these teachers.

Where there has developed more of an RE community in England is on-line forums. Save RE and the RE Teachers Forum are closed groups on Facebook where teachers offer and ask for support for planning and resources. None of the teachers in this study reported drawing upon such forums for planning, but the internet was seen as a source of curriculum knowledge for Jacob and Yoofi, both non-specialists.

The decentralised nature of England's educational cultural system, though, is only one way of accounting for the way that these five teachers have arrived at such diverse curricula for religious education.

Neo-liberalism

T¹

Jessop (2002) discusses different forms of neo-liberalism as a political philosophy and Birch (2018) sets out the areas of interest to research neo-liberalism's impact on society as well as the economy. It is generally seen as a reformed form of liberalism – which is itself multivalent – which holds that the market will provide the best outcomes as long as the market has the right mechanisms in place to ensure that it is not abused. As an economic and political philosophy it seeks the reduction of the state and growth of market players who can take over the running of traditional state concerns. The belief is that businesses and civil society can do better than government in areas such as transport, health and education (Brown and Jacobs 2008). The establishment of the Free School programme, along with the desire for all schools to leave local authority control, as set out in *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) and *The Case for Change* (DfE 2010a), can be seen as the logical consequence of this philosophy as applied to education. However, for this to work, there has to be clear accountability to the state that funds such schools and academies so that the public get the best return for their investment through taxation.

Initially, decentralisation and all forms of liberalism worked well together. Archer (1979), in contrasting the education systems of England and Russia, it is possible to see the roots of England's education system in liberalism and Russia's in a centralised command economy, Archer's study being undertaken when Russia was part of the USSR. Neo-liberalism though has centralising tendencies by making everyone responsible to the centre through performativity, accountability and regulation. Ball (2003; 2006; 2013) and Reay, Crozier and James (2011) write about the impact that neo-liberalism has on the education system in England. The system is characterised by regulation, a process that started in England in 1988 with the establishing of Ofsted and the introduction of SATs²⁶ at Key Stages 1 to 3 for all pupils in maintained schools. The growth of managerialism and accountability systems together has increasingly characterised the English education system since the Labour government of 1997 (Bangs, MacBeath and Galton 2011) despite efforts to the contrary (Angus 1998). Apple (2004) describes neo-liberalism as in the driving seat of education along with neo-conservatism. *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) and *The Case For Change* (DfE 2010a) do promote a neo-conservative agenda by going back to the privileging of some subjects over others, as can be seen by the development of the EBacc measure. The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is not a formal qualification for pupils, rather a group of traditional subjects by which secondary schools can be measured in terms of the curriculum they offer and how well pupils do in these subjects. This is based on the presumption that parents want a more traditional academic education in contrast to a progressive education. This has a consequence for RE as it is not included in the basket of traditional subjects that form the EBacc. As schools will not be held accountable for their results in Religious Studies²⁷ the impact on RE has been marginalisation in schools without a religious foundation (NATRE 2017).

²⁶ SATs is the commonly used term for National Curriculum Assessments in England introduced as a result of the 1988 Education Reform Act. Over the years these have changed and developed. At the time of writing the arrangements were found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-and-assessment-information-for-schools>, last accessed 4 May 2019.

²⁷ Religious Studies here refers to a qualification as opposed to Religious Education, which is an entitlement for all pupils not withdrawn by their parents.

T² – T³

The evidence from the case studies is that neo-liberalism had an impact on these teachers in differing ways. At an institutional level, the Church of England schools are the only schools that are having their planning scrutinised. Notionally that was done by the governing bodies, but as the people doing the planning are in the senior leadership teams tasked with the process of scrutiny, it is difficult to see how this works in the sense of the governing body being a critical friend. For a more objective view, these schools look to SIAMS inspections and in both of these cases the RE curriculum was seen to be Outstanding.

John noted that the market in education could mean that if RE alienated a specific group of parents who were demographically significant to the school, that would be to the school's detriment. The added pressure here comes from the school being given notice to improve by Ofsted. He was quite sure that if the school did not improve, RE curriculum time could be cut to ensure that the 'core' subjects get more time and prominence. The latter situation John shares with Yoofi. The planning of both is under scrutiny, not in the specifics of what is taught, but in relation to the accountability measure. Below average results in public examinations had triggered Ofsted inspection and intervention in both schools. As a result, planning at Key Stage 3 is dominated by the needs of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4. At a socio-cultural level, there is resistance to this social pressure, but the neo-liberal impact on schools has made education a high stakes endeavour.

For Jacob, Juwayriyah and Kevin, their institutions are not under pressure from the state. All are in academies where public examination results were above average and as a result there was no scrutiny of the curriculum and Ofsted inspection was not an immanent threat. For Jacob and Juwayriyah, this meant that they were not held accountable for not fulfilling the stated policy of their respective academy trusts, that they should deliver RE according to the locally agreed syllabus. Neo-liberalism concern is market performativity so if these schools are performing well, there is no need to be concerned about what they providing in terms of the KS3 curriculum.

Multicultural Society and Secularisation

T¹

It cannot be doubted that England is multicultural, especially in urban areas (ONS 2011). It is also the case that people's identification with religion has changed dramatically in a relatively short space of time (compare ONS 2001 with ONS 2011). However, these processes, have a longer history in England. Since the publication in 1966 of *Religion in Secular Society* by Bryan Wilson (1969), secularisation theory has been contested (Hunter 2017; Martin 1995). Field (2015) moves the argument away from the changing power dynamics in social structures to the changing nature of each individual's identity and studies among young people show that they are less likely to identify themselves as belonging to a religious tradition than their parents (Collins-Mayo and Pink 2010; Bullivant 2018). Immigrants, though, were much more likely to identify with religion and much less likely to say they had no religion.²⁸ People from certain ethnic groups, such as Muslims²⁹ (Jacobson 1998; Hussain and Bagguley 2005) and Africans (Rogers 2013), are more likely to identify with religion as a carrier of cultural value than the White British population. The picture, though, is more complex than a simple narrative of decline interrupted by immigration, as noted by Davie (2015) and Goodhew and Cooper (2019), where it is clear that there are signs of religious growth and where the significance of religious institutions are growing due to the retreat of the state from some key areas of society (Woodhead and Catto 2012).

The UK is not alone in experiencing secularisation as a process and how that process leads to changes in the way that the purpose and content of RE is affected as a result. Stolk, Gasenbeek and Veugelers (2016) looked at the process of the secularisation of religious education in the Netherlands in comparison with Britain, concluding that how secularisation theory can be applied to religious education is much more difficult

²⁸ This analysis was done by the Office for National Statistics from the 2011 Census data:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/2011censusanalysisethnicityandreligionofthenonukbornpopulationinenglandandwales/2015-06-18>

²⁹ Muslims and Africans do not constitute ethnic groups per se but are treated as such in the literature, for Muslims this is as a result of particular patterns of migration from the 1950s onwards. It is also the case that some Muslims see their Islam as bound to their ethnicity but not exclusive to it.

than first imagined; other European countries have also experienced this effect (Andreassen 2014).

T² – T³

The only teacher who spoke about the religion of their pupils in any detail was John and it was always in relation to the significant minority ethnic groups in his school, African and Latin American. He had made adjustments in light of their presence. Secularisation, though, permeated the narrative of four of the teachers in this study. Unless pupils were visibly or obviously religious they were imagined as non-religious. This was especially true of White British pupils and White other pupils with an EU background. In part this was due to teachers having no clear picture of what their pupils' lives entailed beyond the school. For example, Jacob was unaware of the substantial numbers of pupils from the EU who attended the local Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches or the numbers of White British pupils who positively associated with a local Baptist church.

In neither Church of England school was RE associated with induction in a faith tradition. RE was not seen to be playing a role in the faith development of pupils in any specific sense. Kevin made a clear distinction between religious education and collective worship, although he constructed RE as about the 'religious quest'.

The most obvious way in which the process of secularisation has had an impact on RE in four of these schools was that the overriding value of RE was as a way of teaching tolerance, as explored below. For Jacob particularly, but also for John and Juwayriyah, religious difference was constructed broadly along ethnic lines. White British people don't have religion – other than the exceptions – Black and Minority Ethnic people have religion – other than the exceptions. As a result, RE is a proxy for a form of Citizenship education that focuses on a civic virtue. To this extent, works such as Felderhof and Thompson (2014) and the work of the Jubilee Centre³⁰ at the University of Birmingham are evidence of the secularisation of RE in England whilst trying to establish a non-secularised view of RE based around the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus, as it elides religious education with moral education and character

³⁰ <https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1755/projects/current-projects/religious-education-teachers>

development. The 2007 Birmingham Agreed Syllabus was notable (Copley 2008) in that it purposefully did not follow the National Framework for RE (QCA 2004) in an attempt to go back to the Education Reform Act 1988 (HMSO 1988). The attainment targets for RE in the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus were:

Learning *about* faith; and

Learning *from* religious traditions

with the two attainment targets requiring school to develop twenty-four ‘dispositions’ from their teaching about Christianity and other religious traditions amongst their pupils. As opposed to

Learning about religion; and

Learning from religion.

as found in the National Framework for RE (QCA 2004).

The Birmingham Agreed Syllabus Conference wanted to promote ‘social coherence and solidarity and create social capital in the City’ (Birmingham City Council 2007:4), an agenda that was promoted by faith leaders in Birmingham. In this way RE became less about inducting pupils into a religious tradition (Groome 1980; Gearon 2013) and more about RE being an instrument for promoting a better society (Gearon 2014). Felderhof (in Barnes 2012) argues that religious education should remain separate from the teaching of secular humanism as the curriculum as legislation (HMSO 1988) distinguishes between the religious and the secular; arguing that the secular dominates the entire space of education other than religious education. He does not, though, proffer a theological underpinning for religious education, rather a social argument on the basis of pupils sharing in the common life of a community that is designated Christian.

Jacob and Yoofi conceal their beliefs about religion in the classroom, and in their schools more generally. Yoofi sees herself as a Universalist whilst rooted in one tradition; Jacob had no religion but believes he can represent any religion authentically as if he were an adherent of that faith. For Juwayriyah it is more difficult

to conceal her religious identification as she is obviously from a Muslim background as evidenced by her name and ethnicity, although she had stopped wearing hijab at the time of the research. For John and Kevin their positions within Church of England schools as curriculum leads for RE and members of the Senior Leadership Team makes it more difficult not to be identified as religious, and both are. Nevertheless neither identify RE as part of the religious formation of their pupils by design.

Copley (2005) argued that there is a form of secularist indoctrination taking place in RE and that this project had gone unchallenged. His argument was that it is not just that RE is being secularised but that RE itself was a secularising influence, at times unwittingly. The only exception to this in this study is Kevin. Kevin's RE does not take account of ethnicity in terms of religion and he does not see that the main aim of RE is to promote tolerance. What separates Kevin from the other teachers, in this study, is that he is from a country that until recently was one of the least secularised in Europe and he left before that process was fully underway, the Irish Republic. He imagines his pupils as caught up in a quest for meaning and religious education provides the space to encounter that. To this extent he is more in line with the opinions in Whittle (2015; 2018) in England and in Shanahan (2017) in Ireland, that religious education is about the task of promoting a quest for meaning within a communal context and on which other communal contexts might shed light. This is consistent with the Roman Catholic view promulgated in *Nostra Aetate* (Holy See 1965a), that the truth can be found in non-Christian religions whilst at the same time holding that the Church of Rome is the repository of all revealed truth necessary for salvation.

Multiculturalism and secularisation are features of the Cultural System in England and appear to be having a significant impact on the way that four of these teachers in this study plan RE in, even when they are not aware of it.

There is a further question here, though. *The State of the Nation Report* (NATRE 2017) noted the decline of RE at Key Stage 4, especially in Academies. The pressure of the need to ensure that pupils contribute positively to the accountability measures upon which the school is judged, especially the EBacc of which RE is not a part, is seen to have a deleterious impact on RE generally. There is another way of reading

this decline of RE in Academies, on the basis of the case studies in this thesis. The one school that has no RE at Key Stage 4 and had only reinstated RE as a discrete subject at Key Stage 3 was the one school not in London. Juwayriyah was not appointed to teach RE but her own efforts have re-established it within the curriculum in a long process that has appealed to various arguments for its importance. At the time of the research, she was increasingly confident that it would be reintroduced to KS4 in some way. This anxiety was absent from the other four schools based in the Greater London area. The research on religion in London (Goodhew and Cooper 2019) indicates that religion is an area of growth and growing significance. Whilst this may not have a direct impact on the way teachers organise the curriculum, it does appear to have the effect of ensuring that curriculum time for RE is secure, even where the school is under scrutiny from Ofsted, as was the case with John and Yoofi.

Tolerance

T¹

Trudgian (1969:21) reporting on the National Teachers Conference of the Christian Education Movement at St. Martin's College, Lancaster on the 10th-14th April 1969 concluded:

‘The Conference fully brought out the needs and tensions of a multi-cultural society, but also gave glimpses of an enriching unity which could be fostered by the educator as he brought the children in his charge to a sense of their own value as individuals and their own particular contribution to the unity and peace of the world.’

The changing nature of society gave religious educators a challenge in light of the way RE had been taught in schools from 1870 onwards. This led to a problematising of religious education, as can be seen from the Schools Council Working Paper 36: *Religious education in secondary schools* (1971), John Hull’s *New Directions in Religious Education* (1981) and Edwin Cox’s *Problems and Possibilities of Religious Education* (1983). There were solutions offered such as Grimmitt’s *Religious Education and Human Development* (1987). This crisis about the nature of religious education is not specific to England, though, as can be seen from work done in this area by the Council of Europe (2007), that aligns religious diversity with the need for intercultural education – of which religious education forms a part.

More broadly, there have been progressive steps towards securing the rights of people from diverse backgrounds culminating in the Equality Act 2010³¹ and the protected characteristics set out there, religion and belief being one. There has also been specific guidance for schools in implementing the legislation³², which states:

‘It should be particularly easy for schools to demonstrate that they are fostering good relations since promoting good relations between people and groups of all kinds is inherent in many things which they do as a matter of course. It may be shown through – for example - aspects of the curriculum which promote tolerance and friendship, or which share understanding of a range of religions or cultures ...’ (DfE 2014: 34).

Tolerance, though, is not a simple verb. Bejan (2017) explores different models of tolerance that have their origins in the 17th century. She distinguishes between civil silence (Hobbes), civil charity (Locke) and mere civility (Williams). It is tolerance, in each form, that allows civil and political society to work. Famously, Alastair Campbell interrupted the then Prime Minister Tony Blair by saying: ‘We don’t do God’.³³ This might be termed the Hobbesian position where civil silence leads to a less contested secular space and therefore toleration of a sort.

T² – T³

Four of the teachers in this study do talk about tolerance as the aim of RE, but this is tolerance is comparable to Locke’s concept of civil charity where learning about the other will lead to better understanding and tolerance. This was seen clearly in the design of Jacob’s and Juwayriyah’s curriculum offer, the former tending more towards Citizenship and the latter, Philosophy. It was also seen in the path of resistance that John and Yoofi were engaged in, by broadening RE to include religions that had effectively been excluded by the pressure to ensure that RE contributed to the schools’ Progress 8 measure.

³¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

³² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-2010-advice-for-schools>

³³ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1429109/Campbell-interrupted-Blair-as-he-spoke-of-his-faith-We-dont-do-God.html>

In many ways these teachers are mirroring the changes that Meakin (1988) made to his original justification for RE as a subject, initially put forward in 1979. In the first article he saw two justifications for RE, firstly its contribution to the curriculum as a whole from the perspective of phenomenology; and, secondly its contribution to personal autonomy. By 1988 he was questioning RE's contribution to personal autonomy and puts forward an argument for the:

‘... contribution religious education can make to the promotion of tolerance in today's multi-ethnic society.’ (Op.Cit: 92)

Kevin is the only teacher who does not talk about tolerance in relation to RE; the key explanatory difference being his socialisation and education. Whilst Ireland is becoming a more diverse country, the level of diversity and the history of migration is very different to that of England (Onyejelem 2005) and the subject of immigration and its impact on society remains contested (Ging and Malcolm 2004; Ging, Cronin and Kirby 2009). For the others, the concept that tolerance is the key aim and virtue of RE is unquestioned and is axiomatic.

Towards structural elaboration or structural reproduction T⁴?

The fourth part of Archer's (1995) socio-morphogenetic sequence is structural elaboration. This structural elaboration leads to the development of a modified or new cultural structure (T¹). In this section I argue that the Commission on Religious Education and its Final Report (REC 2018) was an attempt to redefine RE by changing the structures that currently surround it, reflective as they are of a previous cultural structure. To what extent it will be successful still has to be determined, as there have been attempts to reject the report from three stakeholders, the Jewish community³⁴, Roman Catholic community³⁵ and the National Association of SACREs.³⁶ It has also been questioned by some academics (Hannam and Biesta 2019; Smalley 2019). Nevertheless, the report signals that the process of social elaboration is taking place in concrete ways.

³⁴ <https://www.bod.org.uk/commission-on-re-report-is-fundamentally-flawed/>

³⁵ <http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/component/k2/item/1003658-catholic-education-service-response-to-the-commission-on-religious-education-report>

³⁶ <http://nasacre.org.uk/file/nasacre/1-533-response-to-core-final.pdf>

The Commission on Religious Education

In my research context, I considered the Commission for RE and its interim and final reports in terms of the findings of the commission in relation to the evidence that had been presented. Here I am looking solely looking at the recommendations and how they reflect both the cultural structure and the socio-cultural discourse that led to those recommendations.

All of the teachers in this study were aware of the work the Commission but their reaction to it was varied. When asked about the work of the Commission that was in process when the research was being undertaken, none of the four English teachers showed much appetite for a national syllabus for RE. Only Kevin, the one non-English teacher, said that it would be a good thing.

The Final Report of the Commission on RE (REC 2018) had eleven recommendations, of which I shall look at the five.

Decentralisation of RE and centralisation of RE

The Commission recommends the abolishing of Agreed Syllabus Conferences (Recommendation 4) and the replacement of SACREs with Local Advisory Network for Religion and Worldviews (Recommendation 8). It is proposed that these would be more inclusive than current SACREs and would support RE in local schools. They would also support the implementation of the national entitlement.

There is an interesting tension here. Referring to Chater's question (Chater and Erricker 2013) 'how local is local?' there is no scope for creating a more local body a than local authority body. The desire to move the locus of the 'local' to something more local than the local authority is difficult. The creation of multi academy trusts (MAT) to replace local authorities has not meant greater localism. MATs cover more than one locality and they are not necessarily geographically contiguous, as can be seen in Jacob's case. The other issue is that schools doing poorly may be moved out of the MAT they are in and assigned to another. Hence, there is no stability in the system that can be relied on. A school's geographic location is unlikely to greatly change.

Stuck with the local authority as the most coherent and reliable structure the way to change the nature of the local is to change which groups can be represented on the body that replaces SACREs. Section 7 of the report argues both for change to the existing settlement and also what should replace it. The recommendation removes the democratically elected representatives of the people in the form of councillors, yet retaining the local authority's function of appointing and funding the body. Here we see that religious education is removed from local democratic control but not from the local responsibility to support RE.

This, though, is for the purpose of greater centralisation of RE, as can be seen in Recommendation 8 b:

‘The Local Advisory Network for Religion and Worldviews must facilitate the implementation of the National Entitlement to the study of Religion and Worldviews in all schools within the local authority boundaries by providing information about sources of support available, and must connect schools with local faith and belief communities and other groups that support the study of Religion and Worldviews in schools.’

The regulation and centralisation of RE

The national entitlement would come in the form a national syllabus written by a standing conference of nine people appointed by the RE Council and supported by the government (Recommendation 3) and the implementation of this syllabus would be subject to inspection.

Initial teacher education providers would have to ensure that their courses provided a specified amount of teaching about the national entitlement, with support for the specialism and showing parity with EBacc subjects in secondary ITE courses. For serving teachers there would be funding for a programme of CPD (Recommendations 6 and 7). The latter two recommendations would support the implementation of the national entitlement and its programmes of study. This would seem counter to the government's understanding that even the National Curriculum is only a model for academies and Free Schools where they can show they have devised a better curriculum offer.

The impact of Secularisation on RE in England

The final report calls for the name of the subject from Religious Education to be changed to Religion and Worldviews (Recommendation 1) and that there should be a defined national entitlement for RE which all schools funded by the state should follow (Recommendation 2). A sign that religion is becoming less important is that non-religious worldviews should be included in the new subject. However, defining what constitutes a non-religious worldview and what is to be taught about it is more difficult than imagined (Everington 2019).

A sign of the secularisation of RE comes in the section that addresses the issue of how a curriculum would be constructed to meet the national entitlement where it is stated:

‘To some extent, which particular worldviews are studied is not as important as whether pupils have gained an understanding of the main elements of the National Entitlement, the core skills required, the range of academic approaches to the study of worldviews, the attitudes that enable them to work with others with whom they might disagree, and space to reflect on their own developing worldviews.’ (Op.Cit 73)

That there is no privileging of one religious tradition over another indicates that the historic power and influence of the Christian churches has dissipated, which may explain in part the highly critical response of the Catholic Education Service to the CoRE report³⁷ and that of the Board of Deputies of British Jews³⁸, although it is more likely the case that concern that the settlement would be imposed on their schools is the major factor.

Tolerance or respect?

For four of the teachers in this study ‘tolerance’ is the key purpose of RE. The CoRE Final Report though eschews reference to tolerance in terms of what RE is engendering in pupils. Rather the key concept used in the Final Report is ‘respect’, a concept that appears eleven times. The word tolerance appears six times but in two specific contexts.

³⁷ <http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/component/k2/item/1003658-catholic-education-service-response-to-the-commission-on-religious-education-report>

³⁸ <https://www.bod.org.uk/commission-on-re-report-is-fundamentally-flawed/>

Tolerance appears most commonly not in the text of the report proper but in quotes from those giving evidence, four times in all. The term respect only occurs twice in the similar quotes.

Where the word tolerance appears in the text proper it only refers to those who wish to withdraw their child from RE.

The terms tolerance and respect are not mutually exclusive but the demand made by the latter term is more demanding than the former. This is indicated in the report itself when it identifies a need for parents who indicate their desire to withdraw their child that ‘they understand the need for tolerance of all faiths and beliefs’ (paragraph 149).

On the basis of the report tolerance is a lower common denominator than respect and is not aspirational in terms of RE. What the Commission wanted was that pupils respect other and, as a result, the less positive term tolerance is effectively excluded; but for a neo-liberal society to function it does not need people to respect others, it does need tolerance (Reay, Crozier and James 2011). As a moral system all that ultimately matters for neo-liberalism is that we do right by our families and close associates. The ‘other’ is less significant; we have no moral obligation to society as a whole as there is no society per se. Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher’s 1996 Joseph Memorial Lecture delivered to the Centre for Policy Studies summed up this position:

‘And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families. And no governments can do anything except through people, and people must look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours.’³⁹

Is the CoRE report a neo-liberal solution to the ‘problem’ of RE?

If, as stated above, neo-liberalism works on regulation of markets of which education can be seen as one (Arnott and Menter 2007; Ball 2006; 2013; Bangs, MacBeath and

³⁹ <https://www.ft.com/content/d1387b70-a5d5-11e2-9b77-00144feabdc0>

Galton 2010; Reay 2017; Reay, Crozier and James 2011) to what extent is that reflected in the CoRE report?

Firstly, there is a market of a sort operating in the English education system and there is a desire to expand and diversify that market (DfE 2010). Part of that market is the presence of schools with a religious foundation funded by the State. Neo-liberalism (Jessop 2002; Birch 2018) sees that the State should not interfere in markets but protect and equalise them through legislation. Schools with a religious character can be seen to have unfair exemptions in terms of State funding, an argument that goes back to 1870 Education Act on the issue of teaching ‘religion on the rates’⁴⁰. Whilst schools without a religious foundation have to teach RE according to a definition in the 1988 Education Act (HMSO 1988) schools with a religious foundation do not, other than controlled schools. There is a perception that ‘faith’ schools do better than non-religious schools⁴¹, although this is disputed⁴². To what extent the change in the entitlement to RE in schools with a religious foundation would have an impact on equalising the market is hard to see but the idea that there should be a particular type of privilege within in a market is anathema to neoliberal thought.

Secondly, if education is a market it has to be both regulated and inspected for regulation to be effective. The CoRE report clearly expects to ensure that the proposed national entitlement is delivered in all schools, irrespective of their religious foundation. This function is also, in part, shared by the Local Advisory Networks for Religion and Worldviews, which have to report to the local authority and the government on its work that includes securing the delivery of the national entitlement.

There appears to be an anomaly though in the CoRE report. The report clearly calls for the better training of teachers and trainee teachers to deliver the new subject. The report has an emphasis on professional development, mentioning it twelve times, and

⁴⁰ https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1870/jul/25/elementary-education-bill#s3v0203p0_18700725_hol_21

⁴¹ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/best-uk-schools-guide-church-schools-challenge-top-fee-paying-preps-9vdj725tn>, last accessed 10 May 2019.
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2016/08/29/faith-schools-are-beacons-of-intellectual-rigour/> last accessed 10 May 2019.

⁴² <https://humanism.org.uk/2018/11/19/faith-schools-do-not-perform-better-than-other-schools-humanists-uk-sets-record-straight/>

teachers clearly need to be trained to a high standard to deliver the new subject. The national entitlement as inspected by Ofsted sees increased regulation of the subject, and here is the tension. Research strongly indicates that increase in regulation leads to a diminishing of professionalism (Stahlke Wall 2017) even though governments often conflate the two concepts (Department of Health 2016). This anomaly though exists in other neoliberal states. Elkins and Elliot (2006) chart the development of increasing government control over what teachers teach. They note that even where ministers talk about ‘devolution’ of education to schools and teachers it is not a system without a strong sense of national accountability. This is now such a feature of England’s educational cultural system that it has become accepted that this is what teaching is about (Wilkins 2010; Sachs 2012).

Where the prevailing Cultural System did not apply in this research

Throughout the analysis of the impact of the cultural system on RE teachers’ planning at Key Stage 3, Kevin stands out as different and here I seek to account for that as.

Kevin appears to be untouched by the cultural structure that surrounds him, a cultural structure that he has not internalised. Unlike the others he does not favour decentralisation, rather he wants a centralised system that he can negotiate, whether that be a national entitlement or Understanding Christianity. Whilst he is aware of the regulatory framework surrounding schools he is less concerned about it, as he is in a school that has good results and a good record of inspection. His school is part of a successful academy chain and there is a sense that it is promoting academic excellence, something he and the state values (DfE 2010). Therefore, he has not been challenged by close scrutiny of what he does and has not had to reappraise his position.

As noted previously, his only reference to tolerance is the intolerance of parents, something noted in the CoRE report with reference to parental withdrawal. Whilst he does not see RE as a place for catechesis he does believe that it is about engaging with the significant existential questions at an academic level, hence his desire for all pupils to do A Level. Unlike Juwayriyah, who also has this aspiration, Kevin brings the topics covered at A Level down to Key Stage 3, before pupils take GCSE in case pupils miss out, an anxiety he shared in the interview on planning RE at KS3. In this

Kevin reflects more the position of Sean Whittle (2015) in taking seriously the philosophical and theological questions that confront human beings, seeing the 'religious' life of the school as being part of the broader context of the educational experience following Maritain (1952) where there is an inner dynamism to education created by the interaction of the pupil with the teacher. Maritain (Op.Cit) adopts a Thomistic approach to education that itself has more broadly influenced Catholic education (Groom 1980; Rowland 2003), in particular Irish education due to the influence of the Catholic Church (Coolahan 1981).

In Shanahan's (2017) collection of papers from a conference held at St Patrick's College, Thurles, in 2013 the Irish voices echo much more of Kevin's position, although he is teaching as a Roman Catholic in an Anglican school. RE is about space for the quest of human life, it is about identity in terms of self and others; and it is inflected with the importance of academic enquiry at all levels. What Kevin appears to have done is transported his own internal world to England but not modified it in the process, even though for a number of years he taught with John and shared responsibility for curriculum development.

Kevin serves in this context as a point of counter reference against which the other teachers in this study can be viewed. It is not possible to say whether Kevin is typical or not and therefore it is not possible to make claims beyond these five teachers, but he does open up another, future avenue of enquiry. The use of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) might offer an interesting way of analysing non-native teachers and how they approach planning from within a cultural framework that might be at odds with the cultural structure that informs the education system and school where they are working, but this is not possible here.

Kevin's case study also poses a question to the socio-morphogenetic approach. When Archer framed the theory in 1979 it was the case that there were non-British teachers in British schools but there is no way of accounting for those within the system who do not conform to the cultural system of the place that they find themselves. This is an indication that macro-sociology has to be checked against micro-sociological research to be challenged in its assumptions and to develop theory further.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to explore whether it is possible to identify characteristics of the cultural system (cultural structure) that had a downward pressure on the planning of five teachers at the socio-cultural level, using the framework set out by Margaret Archer (1979; 1988; 1995). Archer argues that it is not only possible to talk about a cultural structure, it is necessary so that different cultures can be compared and contrasted; but also because it sheds light on socio-cultural interactions and actions, even when actors are not directly aware of them. This has an impact on the way that we construct our view of teacher agency when it comes to planning. It also helps to explain why teachers might have made curriculum decisions without being aware of the broader cultural system, as it exists within them as a field of meaning and significance that goes unquestioned.

My argument is that Critical Realist analysis is not only a positive way forward in providing a broader explanatory narrative for understanding teachers' planning, it is vital if researchers are to understand the impact that a cultural system has on teachers and therefore the need to build into teacher education programmes both reflectivity (Pollard et al 2008) and reflexivity (Hammersley et al 2007).

Chapter 8: Drawing the thesis together

In this chapter I begin by summarising the findings of this research. The summary will be grouped under the questions that formed the basis of the research and the development of the case studies. On the basis of this I make recommendations to particular bodies that have responsibility for education generally and RE specifically. Secondly, I look at the contribution I believe that this thesis makes to the field of research into teachers and how they act as agents in context. Thirdly, I look at what I believe to be the broader implications for policy and practice, which cut across the recommendations. Finally, I reflect on the research as a whole and in retrospect, the changes that I would make to the process or focus.

The research questions

The primary question was:

How is the decision about what to teach in religious education at Year 8 made in five English secondary schools?

Subsidiary questions that inform the answers to the primary question were:

- *How is the planning of RE shaped by the contexts in which this takes place including the particular school context in which teachers find themselves?*
- *What impact, if any, does a teacher's personal history have on their planning of RE?*
- *Does/how does the RE planned reflect teachers' attitudes and values as related to their understanding of the purpose(s) of RE?*
- *What role does negotiation and compromise play in teachers' planning of RE?*

I begin by addressing the subsidiary questions before returning to the initial question.

Summary of Key Findings

Archer (1979; 2013) identified the need to understand the cultural structure of a society in order to understand its education system and the curriculum it provides for pupils in state funded schools. The research, indicates that there are three levels at which influence is exerted, which incorporates the socio-cultural interaction as the lived experience of the teacher as a mediator of cultural structure. In answer to the first sub-question I identify three levels: micro, meso and macro, all exist simultaneously.

How is the planning of RE shaped by the contexts in which this takes place including the particular school context in which teachers find themselves?

Micro context: the school itself

The type of school appears to have an impact on what is planned. In the Church of England schools there was a clear need to respond to what the governors saw as RE and to the SIAMS inspection process. Teachers in non-denominational schools did not have this contextual constraint but all of them did state publically that they followed the locally agreed syllabus, despite being the lack of evidence that they did. At the micro level of the non-denominational school no one was ensuring that what the school had stated it would do, was done. This worked in such a way that in one school there was a clear public commitment to a programme of visits to places of worship, which the curriculum lead for RE knew nothing about. In all five schools there was scrutiny of classroom practice, of assessments that indicated progress and of examination results, but not of the curriculum offer itself in the non-denominational schools. Two of the non-denominational schools had engaged with a local authority adviser for RE but neither teacher concerned had taken the advice given, both making a conscious decision not to. Therefore, there was no expert input into the process of monitoring the curriculum offer.

Only one teacher made a response to the particular demographic of the school. He responded in two ways. Firstly, the teacher recognised that there was a large constituency of parents from one specific ethnic background. Decisions were made to ensure that these parents were not alienated and as a result moved their children to a

different school. Secondly, there had been an influx of pupils from a specific background that the teacher did not feel was represented in the curriculum so the programme of study had been amended to include an aspect of their own religious heritage. This was unique in this research but indicated that if teachers do have a thorough understanding of their pupils' context that could have a shaping effect on the curriculum. Of the other four teachers only one lived within the school's catchment area, but none of them had any clear knowledge or understanding of pupils' context. This may explain why the programme of study was more generic than specific when identifying the needs of pupils. Further evidence of this was that only one teacher appeared to have any knowledge and understanding of the religious affiliations and lives of their pupils. Similarly, the teachers in the non-denominational schools appeared to have little or no understanding of the significant religious institutions in the vicinity of their school.

Within the micro context there is an issue of location in a more general sense. The place of RE within the curriculum was not in doubt in the four schools situated in Greater London. This can be accounted for in what might be termed the London effect (Goodhew and Cooper 2018). The one school that was outside of London had only recently re-introduced RE as a discrete subject at KS3 and there was none at KS4. In the latter case the head teacher had been convinced by the RE curriculum lead of the subject's importance, noting that the teacher carved that role out for herself as she had been appointed to a different position in the school. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that place is a significant factor as to whether RE is taught at all, but it appears not to have a specific influence on the curriculum offer more generally. Planning was constrained by time but there was no evidence that teachers saw this as problematic. Resources did not appear to be an issue. All of the schools in these case studies produced their own resources.

In summary, the status of the school in terms of religious affiliation was significant, as was the place in which it was situated. However, there was little evidence that planning took into account pupils' lived experience and evidence that there was no scrutiny of Key Stage 3 RE in non-denominational schools, with the result that what teachers planned in those schools did not conform to what schools had committed themselves to providing for pupils.

Meso context

The meso context is that which has an impact on the school but not as a result of local peculiarities. The most obvious aspects of this context are the publishing of data relating to the government's accountability measures and Ofsted inspection. It was clear that where performativity drove a school's curriculum scrutiny of teachers was focused on performance; not on the basis of what the curriculum might be contributing to pupils' own development or understanding of the world. This caused resentment and subversion by the teachers affected by this culture and it was something that the other teachers acknowledged as a threat.

It was the case that where schools were under scrutiny from Ofsted, as a result of poor examination performance, planning of RE at KS3 was inflected by the need to ensure pupils could do well in GCSE Religious Studies. Where schools were not under this pressure there was no specific attempt to ensure that pupils had gained a certain amount of knowledge before they started GCSE. In one school there was a strong claim that the KS3 programme of study was designed to give pupils a broader and different form of entitlement to what they would gain from GCSE. In the one school that did not do GCSE, the teacher had the freedom to design the KS3 programme of study as they saw fit.

The GCSE specification for Religious Studies did have an impact in all four of the schools that did GCSE, at the level of planning assessments for Key Stage 3. The mode of assessment in these schools reflected the GCSE nine-level scale. This influence was not obvious in the long-term plans of these schools but was part of the mid-term plans and the culture of the department.

Only one school was legally required to follow the locally agreed syllabus but none did so, as noted above. Three of the teachers were members of local SACREs but none of them followed the advice of the SACRE. When questioned why this was the case the teachers cited the government's narrative that teachers in academies were free to make their own curriculum decisions (DfE 2010). In the local authority areas where the schools were situated there was no scrutiny of RE in individual schools on

the part of SACRE; therefore, even where academies had committed to implementing the locally agreed syllabus there was no mechanism to hold these teachers to account.

In summary, planning in Year 8 specifically and Key Stage 3 generally was influenced by the school being in an Ofsted category and publically available data on school performance. Teachers recognised that if the school was doing well no one would challenge what they were doing; but teachers held that that position was fragile. Where schools were experiencing scrutiny this had a direct impact on the curriculum offer. The introduction of new levels for GCSE did have an impact on assessment in Year 8, where those schools were offering GCSE.

Macro context

This is the broader cultural context in which teachers were planning, a context that is internalised as part of a person's cultural assumptions.

Four of these teachers held in common broadly similar cultural assumptions. Pupils needed RE to prepare them for an increasingly diverse world, one in which they would meet people different from themselves. This was based on a number of cultural assumptions. One was that learning about religions in particular would enable pupils to be better disposed to people identifying with those religions; therefore teachers planned for breadth not depth. There was no sense that this was bound to contact theory, although some teachers expressed the desire that pupils would meet people of faith. The overriding belief was that simply knowing about a religion was seen to be adequate.

For two of these schools, those not under the intense gaze of Ofsted, the six major world religions were all taught over a two year period and given the same amount of teaching time. The two years of KS3 were broadly divided according to a view of religion that contrasts Abrahamic religions and Dharmic religions. In both schools, Abrahamic religions were taught at Y7 with Dharmic at Y8. This was more difficult in the schools where there was Ofsted scrutiny; however, both teachers were expanding RE to move away from the teaching of the two religions pupils needed to know about for GCSE to introduce Dharmic or Eastern religions. One of these was doing this covertly by having a parallel programme of study to that published by the

school. It is reasonable to posit that there is evident a deep cultural urge to be fair to others and to support a form of representational multiculturalism where culture and religion coincide.

In four schools religion was also a cypher for race and ethnicity. On the whole, people of non-White British heritage were identified as having religion but White British people as not having religion. The belief that those of non-White British heritage were religious was supported by the assumption that people from non-White British backgrounds coalesced around religious institutions that transmit and support their cultural heritage. The one teacher was markedly different, being the one non-British teacher, who had been socialised and educated outside of the UK. For this teacher it was necessary to understand their specific cultural context to understand the planning decisions they made.

Of the five teachers only those in the schools with a religious foundation believed that it was important to teach about non-religious worldviews, but for different reasons. This shall be explored below.

In summary, there are broader cultural ideas that have an impact on teachers, as well as educational mechanisms such as inspection and the context of the school itself. These cultural ideas are internalised and become axiomatic when teachers think about curriculum, its purpose and its specifics. This presented itself in a number of ways. For four of these teachers that knowledge is a personal good; that specific virtues result from knowledge; that it is important to be fair. For two of these teachers there is an unquestioned cultural divide between Abrahamic and Dharmic religions and that this should inform curriculum planning in a specific way. The teacher who did not share this with the others highlighted how the internalisation of cultural structure works at the micro level.

What impact, if any, did a teacher's personal history have on their planning of RE?

There were two parts to the personal stories in this study; teachers' personal lives up to the end of their university education and their professional life. I will take these as two distinct parts of the answer to this question.

Four of the five teachers in this study had a religious upbringing, one Muslim and three Roman Catholic. None were teaching in a school that related to their own religious upbringing at the time of the study, although two had done so at the beginning of their careers. Of these four, three associate with and practise, in some way, the religious traditions of their childhood. There was no evidence that they drew upon these backgrounds to plan RE at KS3. To some extent, two of these teachers concealed their own religious background and the teacher from the non-religious background did likewise.

Of the five teachers in this study only two set out to become RE teachers. Of those two, only one produced a programme of study for KS3 that resembled the RE that they had encountered at school, based on a specific resource. What appeared more important to these teachers was the inspiration of their RE teachers whilst at secondary school. Where their teachers had greatest impact was in the influence they had on the style of classroom practice that they wanted to emulate.

Of the three teachers with a Theology or Religious Studies degree, two applied that in some way to planning at KS3. Both of these teachers were in schools with a religious foundation for which Theology was a key concern. However, the way that Theology was applied was different in the two schools, reflecting the cultural background of the teacher and where they had read Theology. Notably, the level of theological language that pupils had to master during KS3 reflected the language of traditional Christian Theology degrees. In this study, it was the case that a degree in Theology did have an impact on what was planned for RE.

All teachers in this study had a PGCE and had trained to be a teacher. Four teachers went through a 'traditional' route of going through a teacher-training programme at a university. The other teacher had trained through Teach First and had remained in the school where he had trained. Only one of the five teachers had been expected to work on and produce a long-term plan for RE as part of their initial teacher education. The programme of study produced by that teacher was the only one that had clear progression in terms of content and concepts over the two years of KS3.

Two of the teachers, who became RE teachers by happenstance, self-identifying as RE teachers ‘by experience’: neither had had any post-qualification training in RE. One teacher had been part of RE teacher networks in a previous authority and had learned what was expected in RE from that experience. When she arrived at the school considered in this research, there was a programme of study in place and changes to that were negotiated. Where she ran an alternative programme of study this was based on a deficit model, pupils needing to be exposed to things that were not currently covered by what the school offered. The other teacher had joined the school as a Citizenship teacher but a HMI subject inspection changed that substantially. HMI criticised the school’s RE and this caused the school to look again at its curriculum. It responded to those criticisms by increasing the RE time and by significantly reducing the time for Citizenship. As a result, this teacher learned to plan RE by observing and then taking responsibility for RE, however this involved no training per se or the recognition that there may have been a need to have a specialist.

The non-denominational schools, which were not in an Ofsted category, had similar programmes of study at Key Stage 3. One had an emphasis on Citizenship and the other on Philosophy, in both cases this could be traced back to the academic backgrounds and interests of the individual teachers.

In summary these five case studies indicated that a teacher’s personal history had no discernable impact on curriculum planning. Rather the specifics of planning are shaped by the context in which the teacher finds him or her self. There is no predictor, however, of what shape that curriculum will take on the basis of a teacher’s own personal or academic background. The agnostic teacher with no specialism and the Muslim teacher with a degree in Religious Studies and the PGCE in RE produce, almost identical, curriculum plans for KS3. There is evidence, though, that personal interest plays a part in curriculum planning where subject content is not directly delivered. However, where a teacher’s academic background coincides with the purpose of the school, and is supported by it, it is possible to see resemblances between what was studied in the degree and PGCE and the curriculum offer of the school.

Does/how did the RE planned reflect teachers' attitudes and values as related to their understanding of the purpose(s) of RE?

Planning in three schools clearly reflected the teacher's beliefs about the purpose of RE. In the two schools where this was not the case, the teachers were clearly aligning RE toward those beliefs.

For four of these teachers the purpose of RE was to develop tolerance in their pupils. As noted this was a general sense of tolerance based on the belief that learning about a religion would have the impact of making pupils more accepting and therefore tolerant to others, what Locke referred to as civil charity. The one exception to this was the teacher for whom RE as personal quest for meaning was the overriding purpose of RE.

In summary, teachers' beliefs were not only evident in their commitment to classroom teaching but also in what was covered in the curriculum plan. However, there was no consistency of approach on how to plan RE on this basis.

What role did negotiation and compromise play in teachers' planning of RE?

In all of the schools in this research the programme of study for RE was negotiated. However, this manifested itself in different ways.

In the denominational schools all the teachers were specialists in RE. Whilst one teacher was responsible for planning, others had a part in that process and there was a negotiated solution that all agreed. However, the programmes of study were different. In one case the programme of study was coherent from beginning to end but the other not so. Where the programme of study was coherent it was, in part, due to the fact that it had been created from first principles by the teacher when he arrived at the school. The other teacher expressed the view that his programme of study was incoherent, as it was based on what had been there before, experimented with and adapted over time. Coherence was given to his programme of study by organising principle of skill acquisition. It was not only the case that the context in which they became curriculum leads was different it was also that they had different assumptions about the aim of the curriculum, one knowledge and the other skills.

In the two non-denominational schools not under Ofsted scrutiny, the programmes of study had been negotiated between teachers, with the input of one specialist. Here breadth was not only seen to be important for pupils but also for teachers that were non-specialists. It was acknowledged that some teachers at KS3 taught what they enjoyed and as long as pupils could do the end of term assessments this was not problematic. This was particularly the case where the teacher had been delivering the subject for some time or was in the senior leadership team. Pushing teachers to deliver what they found difficult, or were unsure about, was not seen as a cost worth paying; especially as teachers have a right not to teach the subject. One teacher was clear in her desire to have a different curriculum offer at Key Stage 3, but because she taught mostly A Level, this was not felt to be possible. As a result, compromise was the only way forward in order not to do damage to the subject or to alienate the staff teaching it.

In the one non-denominational school that Ofsted were regularly inspecting, the programme of study was negotiated in part. Whilst the overriding concern was to prepare pupils for GCSE, when the curriculum lead arrived at the school she negotiated with other teachers to change of some units in Y7 and replace them with what she had brought from her previous school. Other changes she was not able to affect and this led to the development of an alternative programme of study that she taught along with an NQT, who was the only qualified RE specialist in the school.

How was the decision about what to teach in religious education at Year 8 made in five English secondary schools?

This is the question that this thesis rests upon. Firstly, I will focus on the conscious decisions that teachers made about curriculum planning. Secondly, I will highlight three specific influences that contributed to those decision-making processes, which help in understanding the conscious decision making processes

Conscious decision making

There was no single process for arriving at curriculum decisions in Year 8 in these five secondary schools. Decisions were arrived at through processes that were not easy to identify, as some decisions had been made prior to the curriculum leads taking

up their post at the school. Nevertheless, conscious decisions appear to have been based on three pillars:

1. teachers' beliefs about the purpose of RE as something that equipped pupils for life beyond the school – this was largely an imagined life;
2. the number of teachers delivering the subject and their level of specialism – the desire not to alienate non-specialist members of staff was a key theme in schools with no or few RE specialists. In schools where there were specialists there was a desire to allow these to experiment with the curriculum so they could exercise their specialist interests and knowledge;
3. the scrutiny the subject was under as a result of Ofsted inspection, or lack thereof.

There was a lack of a shared understanding of how RE was supposed to achieve its purpose and lack of shared language about what constituted a pupil's entitlement to RE.

Contexts

Below I identify three specific, interconnected contexts these teachers inhabit that enabled me to better understand why their planning was so diverse. There is no evidence that the planning choices they made were purely idiosyncratic. If they had been the only teachers of their subject in the school this may have been different, but in some way they all worked in a context with other teachers so that curriculum had to be negotiated.

The historical and cultural context that secondary RE teachers find themselves in RE in England remains a contested subject, as can be seen from the Commission on RE's interim (CoRE 2017) and final (CoRE 2018) reports and the symposium held at Windsor (College of St George 2016). Conroy et al (2013) concluded that one factor in the current state of RE was lack of clear purpose and the need to ensure that RE fitted in somewhere, becoming a liminal subject. This was not the case for any of these teachers.

Brouillette (1996) in her study of American teachers identified four broad philosophies that drove curriculum development: Humanist, Developmentalist, Social

Efficiency and Social Melioration. None of the teachers in my study saw RE as part of cultural enrichment or cultural situating (Humanist) or preparing pupils for the work place in any specific sense (Social Efficiency). However, four did construct RE around social purpose (Social Melioration). The Abu Dhabi Guidelines on Teaching Interfaith Tolerance published in 2019, sharing the overriding concerns of the Toledo Guiding Principles (OCSE/ODIHR 2007), see the purpose of teaching about religions as to promote a better world, free from the conflict that is seen to arise from religious adherence and non-understanding of difference. The key concern of four of these teachers was to build tolerance in their pupils and, to that extent, find they themselves in a line with a major anxiety of the day. The one teacher for whom this was not true saw RE as primarily about personal quest (Developmentalist), sharing the concerns of the cultural context from which he came, a context of less diversity. These contexts, however, are internalised. What these teachers did was obvious to them and needed no explanation. There was no evidence that their views had been challenged, so they were confirmed in their beliefs.

The context of disconnectedness

A question is posed about why the teachers had never felt challenged about their position on the purpose of RE. Afdal (2010) writes about RE teachers in Norway forming a community of practice. Such a community of practice would have a concept of shared knowledge, understanding and language about what the subject is, what it conveys, how it contributes to the education of the pupil and its significance for society as a whole. There is no sense that this existed amongst these teachers, even those who had previously taught together or taught in close proximity to each other. It is not difficult to argue why this was the case for the two teachers who were RE teachers by happenstance, but more difficult to see why this would be the case for the three specialist teachers. This led me to revisit the area of professional induction as RE teachers.

The context of teacher professional development and planning

As noted, only one teacher had studied curriculum planning as part of their professional development, and their programme of study was clearly structured in a coherent way to develop pupils' knowledge and skills. The focus on lesson planning as required by the Teacher Standards (DfE 2018b), which form the benchmark for teachers entering the profession in England and for future competency, include

nothing about course planning. There is little in the National Professional Qualification for Subject Leaders (DfE 2017b), where only one part of one of the six standards relates to curriculum. The vision of the teaching profession, and subject professionals as part of that, as seen in the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education 1963) and the James Report (DES 1972), was not evident in these teachers. Until the late 1980s there was a clear need to teach curriculum planning as a skill to all teachers, and this can be seen in RE from Holley (1978) and Grimmitt (1987); where there are clear rationales put forward for what RE was to deliver and a clear way to do that in terms of curriculum planning. That one teacher did receive this skill as part of his teacher training indicates his age and the concerns of the university where he trained. For the other four teachers this was a skill that had not been thought to be significant enough to cover. In a period where teachers are given curriculum freedom this skill will become increasingly relevant.

In conclusion it is apparent that the vision of the teacher set out in the *Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) and the *Case for Change* (2010a) cannot be achieved unless there are structures in place to enable that vision to be realised. Unless there is a space for challenging RE teachers about their assumptions, giving them the tools and training to be able to develop curriculum at Key Stage 3, it is unlikely that a model of RE curriculum will emerge that is coherent across England. The focus on classroom practice at the expense of the broader needs of teachers has compounded this situation and makes the non-examined RE curriculum a hostage not to educational thinking but social or personal anxiety.

It would appear to me, on the basis of the above, that in a time when schools are being encouraged to create their own curricula that changes need to be made in England. Different agencies will need to respond relative to their individual remit. I identify five key hegemonic blocs: government, Ofsted, ITE providers, RE professional bodies and SACREs. I then discuss the role of religious communities in relation to the RE curriculum and make suggestions as to their role in the development of RE at Key Stage 3.

I make the following recommendations:

Government

1. there needs to be a review of the impact that the Teacher Standards (DfE 2018a) have on teachers during different stages of their careers
2. consideration should be given to the standards needed for those in positions of curriculum leadership

Ofsted

3. Ofsted should ensure that its inspectors are trained in RE curriculum development in order to be able to judge what constitutes good RE practice;
4. that Ofsted follow up inspections to see if their judgments and recommendations have been taken seriously by schools;

Initial teacher education providers

5. secondary initial teacher education providers need to look at how they are preparing teachers for curriculum, not just classroom, responsibility;
6. secondary pathways into teaching RE courses should provide training on planning RE, for both schools with and without a religious foundation;

RE professional bodies

7. NATRE and AREIAC, along with the REC, should work together to establish a nationally recognised professional profile of what it means to be a curriculum lead in RE;
8. professional development should be provided for non-specialist RE teachers who are given curriculum responsibility in secondary schools;

SACRES

9. where they have not already, SACREs should provide secondary RE teachers with advice on how to plan from the Agreed Syllabus as well as providing planning models, as many currently do;
10. the local authority should be advised to audit the Key Stage 3 RE curriculum offer in light of the stated curriculum on schools' websites.

National Faith Community Representative Bodies

Religion is an abstract concept (Cantwell Smith 1963) but remains useful (Jackson 2004), to talk of 'religions' is to simply multiply abstractions. What exist in reality are religious communities and bodies, some of which represent communities. It is not possible make a recommendation to 'religions' but it is possible to make a recommendation to faith community representative bodies. Recommendation 11, below, needs appropriately contextualising in terms of RE and I set out that context before presenting the recommendation.

From this research it is clear that teachers had very different expectations about what pupils should learn at Key Stage 3 and the lack of content guidance is a serious issue that needs to be addressed.

Conroy et al (2013) note the peculiarity of RE in that it exists in two life forms at the same time, that of education and that of religion. Through Agreed Syllabus Conferences in England and Wales, and through the consultative arrangements in Scotland and Northern Ireland, people of religion have the opportunity to shape what is taught in RE (Hampshire in Barnes 2018). This is not without controversy and is seen by some to be a barrier to good religious education (College of St George 2016). Nevertheless, Jackson et al (DCSF 2010a) note the positive role that faith communities play as resources for religious education in schools across England.

What should be taught about each of the principal religions represented in Great Britain has been an issue historically. In 1994, along with the National Model Syllabuses 1 and 2 (SCAA 1994), the government published the Faith Communities' Working Group Report (SCAA 1994a). The Working Group Report set out what pupils should learn about Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and

Sikhism at each Key Stage. This was not without controversy (Copley 2008) and by 2001 the role of the SCAA material was seen as increasingly problematic (IFN 2001). One of the key issues with the Working Group Report was that it sought to find consensus between people within the same broad tradition and thereby presented a very specific, and at times misleading, view of any one religion. It also proved almost impossible to resource. When the National Framework for RE (QCA 2004) was published there were calls to revisit the Working Group Report but the government refused to entertain that suggestion⁴³. This was probably not helped by the guidance to include smaller, but at times locally significant religious traditions such as Baha'i, Paganism and Zoroastrianism.

Going forward, there has to be an opportunity for faiths to be represented appropriately at each Key Stage but who decides what that means needs to be seriously thought through. The '*Understanding Christianity*' (CEEQ 2014) resource may be a model that others could use but it exemplifies the problem. '*Understanding Christianity*' is a specifically Anglican project and represents one strand of the Christian tradition in England. The Jewish communities in the UK have worked towards this through the Board of Deputies of British Jews⁴⁴ and Humanists UK⁴⁵ have also produced a resource for schools which could act as models. More needs to be done and it needs to be done in a collaborative way but finding a mechanism for that will be difficult. Religions are not monoliths and at times are highly diverse (Cantwell Smith 1963) and how they are presented in RE is a serious pedagogical issue (Jackson 1997 and 2004). One of two ways is open, either the government convenes a body that brings together faith communities to address this issue or faith communities do it for themselves, perhaps through existing bodies such as Inter Faith Network for the UK. Either way will be problematic but the task is urgent.

11. National Faith Representative Community Bodies should work within and between their faith community traditions to provide clear guidance on what

⁴³ I was one of those calling for such a revisiting as a member of AREIAC and as an RE Adviser. I was informed that this was not possible because it was felt that the process was too difficult and too expensive.

⁴⁴ <https://www.bod.org.uk/resources/>

⁴⁵ <https://humanism.org.uk/education/teachers/>

pupils should know and understand about their faith traditions at each key stage.

Implications for policy and practice

Above I set out eleven recommendations for government, statutory agencies and professional bodies. Here I reflect more broadly on the issues that have arisen from this research, which cut across the bodies responsible for RE in England.

Initial teacher education and continuing professional development

There is a clear need to look at how teachers are prepared to be curriculum planners and the skills they will need to be able to execute this. A skill that was taught before 1988 and the National Curriculum (cf. Holley 1978 and Grimmitt 1987) now needs to be rethought, especially as schools have increasingly the right to design and implement their own curricula. There are signs that these concerns are already having an impact on RE specialists, as can be seen from the materials produced for the *Big Ideas for Religious Education* (Wintersgill 2017) project, which takes the issue of planning a progressive curriculum seriously. Proposals for a new Religion and Worldviews curriculum (CoRE 2018), to replace the existing requirements for RE, will not take away the need to develop planning skills in secondary teachers.

Curriculum scrutiny

Given that there is so much scrutiny in schools it is surprising that the RE curriculum is not scrutinised, and this is true for other subjects. There are signs of change in that Ofsted has committed itself to curriculum scrutiny (Ofsted 2019) and to curriculum conversations with heads of departments and curriculum leads (Op.Cit paragraph 187).

Religious education or inter-cultural education

The CoRE (2018) final report proposes that RE should become Religion and Worldviews. The name change may or may not be significant, one teacher believed that what he taught was what CoRE had envisaged and he taught nothing about non-religious worldviews, although the subject name was not RE. The two schools that did teach non-religious worldviews were denominational schools and taught RE. The underpinning issue, though, is that of anthropology. Is being religious additional to

being human, constituent of it or applicable to some and not others (Geertz 1997)? It is when this question is answered will curriculum designers be clear as to what the subject is addressing in the human condition.

Non-UK teachers

There is a clear need to think carefully about what non-British teachers bring to the subject of RE. This does not presume that what they bring is negative but that it needs to be acknowledged, and where necessary addressed. The internalisation of a cultural structure relating to the nature and purpose of education, curriculum subjects individually and RE specifically can be seen from this study to have an impact on pupil entitlement. This needs acknowledging.

What is assumed

Teacher education and professional development needs to be more than about the mechanics of classroom practice, or even the specifics of curriculum planning. The assumption that teachers simply know what is best for their pupils, where planning a curriculum is seen to be somehow natural, needs to be challenged. Similarly, teachers' own assumptions need to be challenged not only at the level of improving their practice (Pollard et al 2018) but also at a more fundamental level. Moving teachers from being artisans to being professionals and educationalists.

Further research

I would suggest that the implications outlined also generate a number of areas in need of further research. I identify the following, as possible areas to research

- the relationship in teachers' minds about what RE is there to do, especially in relation to the teaching of non-Christian religions. The limited evidence here indicates the conflation of RE with inter-cultural education in the minds of teachers, and teachers' views of the religious affiliation of pupils based on ethnicity;
- teachers' perceptions of pupils' lives, where teachers do not live in the community where they teach, and its impact on the curriculum they offer. The gap between the lived lives of teachers and the imagined lives of pupils is worth exploring in terms of the curriculum decisions teachers make;

- the impact on curriculum planning and delivery of teachers who are not socialised or educated in the country they are currently teaching. This study sheds light on only one teacher and it is worth investigating whether he was typical or atypical;
- the assumption that learning about a religious tradition makes a pupils more tolerant to people of that religion; and, further how teachers imagine pupils will react to meeting people of a religious tradition they have not studied, and its implication for curriculum planning.

What this research contributes to the study of religious education

This research makes a number of contributions to the field of the study of religious education in schools.

How RE programmes of study are constructed

This is the first piece of research that has focussed on how RE teachers plan RE in England. There was no research available on how teachers plan RE for their pupils at Key Stage 3 in England that could be found before this study was undertaken. In a context where teachers are given increasing freedom to plan their own curricula it is important to see how they undertake that process. This has to be situated in the broader context of secondary education where planning was done for teachers either by the National Strategies or by QCA up until 2010; although no published research was undertaken by QCA/QCDA on the take up of the RE schemes of work in secondary schools. From the inception of the National Curriculum in 1988 there has been a dearth of thinking about curriculum planning that was a major focus of educational thinkers prior to 1988; despite much written about the curriculum per se.

Whilst there has been much written about what the RE curriculum, starting with Working Paper 36 (Schools Council 1971), this study suggests that there is a need to look again at the issue of curriculum planning. Curriculum planning needs to be a part of the initial and continuing professional development for teachers, as recommended above. This study also indicates that the concept of curriculum entitlement for pupils has moved to a concept of accreditation entitlement in secondary schools, despite the insistence of government (DfE 2010). It was clear from the research presented here that where schools entered candidates for GCSE RS that RE in some way became

inflected with the new examinations specification. For schools in an Ofsted category, due to poor performance, this included both content and assessment criteria; for the other schools the assessment criteria dominated. The key messages for schools going back to 1997 (Barber 1997) have clearly ingrained themselves in the worldviews of teachers that performativity is key.

Critical realist theoretical prism

Whilst it is the case that a critical realist analysis has been undertaken of educational systems as a whole (Archer 1979; 2013), no such theoretical position has been used to look at curriculum planning. This despite the fact that there has been an increased interest in the use of critical and social realism in relation to the curriculum as a whole (Barratt and Rata 2014; Young et al 2014) and religious education in particular (Kueh 2014; Kueh in Castelli and Chater 2018; Wright 2007; 2015). However, those writing about the importance of critical realist perspectives for the teaching of religious education focus almost exclusively on the place of knowledge in the curriculum and religious claims. None of them look at the broader perspective of analysing RE in terms of cultural structure and how that informs socio-cultural interaction in a socio-morphogenetic sequence.

Therefore, part of the contribution of my thesis is to highlight that there is a clear need to understand curriculum decisions in light of the prevailing cultural structure, as defined by Archer (1979; 1988; 1995). It is by using critical and social realism in this way that we can not only account for teachers' decisions, but also, enter into a meaningful discussion about the impact of prevailing culture as something real; which has to be taken into account when thinking about future curriculum planning in RE.

The research also contributes to how social realists construct the concept of cultural structure. The question remains who or what decides what constitutes cultural structure at any one time and at what point that cultural structure can be said to have changed. However, being able to use cultural structure as a basis for analysis within a cultural system, and not simply between them as Archer does (1979; 2013), allows the researcher to understand the origins of state institutions such as Ofsted and shed a light on teachers' own exercise of agency (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson 2015).

The use of repertoires of action research

The research shows that repertoires of action research methodology is a fruitful way forward for looking at the way that teachers make curriculum decisions in their context. Just as Fincham et al (2012) adapted Carmin and Balser (2002), it was necessary to adapt the model further to use in relation to teachers and schools. The methodology allowed for the collection and organisation of data that enabled comparison between cases, looking at a wide range of data from each subject. This allowed for both internal and external triangulation.

By definition repertoires of action research rests on the premise that there is action per se. Here the action was the planning of religious education in one year of the secondary schools curriculum. The methodological problem was how the process could be identified without solely relying on the teacher's own narrative, as conversations could lead to idealised and abstract conversations about processes. Focussing on an artefact, the plan itself, in light of Afdal's (2010) use of Engeström's (1999) activity theory, proved to be a positive place to start, not least as it showed anomalies in some of the case studies between what the school said it was providing and what the teacher said they were doing. I further developed the methodology by replacing institutional narrative (Carmin and Balser 2002) and reconstructed personal narratives (Fincham et al 2012) with personal history, personal and professional, to inform the process of discerning curriculum construction. Recognising that teachers' personal histories are dynamic and not static I drew upon insights from decision research (Carroll and Johnson 1990). In this way I acknowledged that what teachers say about curriculum planning may not itself represent what happened but rather may be acting as a justification for present practice.

In conclusion

This research began with a very simple question about how teachers in five secondary schools went about the planning of RE in Year 8. The question came out of a prior question that I posed in 2013, which was about the impact of teachers' academic backgrounds on their teaching of RE. That research had its roots in the White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (2010), and *The Case for Change* (2010a), which accompanied it. It was also rooted in my own history as a professional religious

educator, both within the faith sector and in non-denominational schools. As an RE Adviser and Inspector I spent much of my professional life working on curriculum development and planning, at a local authority and national level.

It would seem that teaching is really very simple; as most of us have been to schools we know what schools are about and who the successful teachers were. We also know the subjects we liked. If teaching is simple, you do not need to be a qualified teacher to be a good one (DfE 2010; 2010a) and planning cannot be that difficult either. This research shows that neither assumption is sound but both have led to a situation where there is insufficient attention given to what it is to be a teacher beyond classroom management and what it means to construct a curriculum for pupils that is more than instrumentalist.

There are important arguments about the nature and purpose of education, especially that provided by the state. Economic concerns have driven education since it became public in the 19th Century (Wolf 2002; White 2009) and there is a constant need to re-think not only the direction, but also the purpose of education (Barber 1997; White 2004; Reiss and White 2013). The broader context in which RE teachers find themselves cannot be ignored. Whilst economic concerns cannot be denied or the role that education is thought to play in the development of economy (Wolf 2002), there are specific pressures put on RE – as can be seen from the 2019 Abu Dhabi Guidelines on Teaching Interfaith Tolerance⁴⁶. Within this, the concept of a liberal education appears subsumed to the overriding societal concerns of the day and education, including religious education, is further instrumentalised.

This has been a fascinating journey and has challenged me as the research progressed. Recognising that I am myself, subject to the social processes of the day, informed by the cultural structure in which I am situated has been important for my own academic, professional and personal development. That the teachers in this study are subject to cultural structure seems obvious, but that I am thus subject is less obvious, as I take on the perspective of the interested observer working under the fallacy of assumed neutrality (Angell and Demetis 2010). To this extent I have been challenged to look

⁴⁶ <http://www.hedayahcenter.org/media-details/49/news/51/latest-news/947/launch-of-abu-dhabi-guidelines-on-teaching-interfaith-tolerance-education>

again at my commitments as I engage at the socio-cultural level and place myself within the arguments of the day (College of St George 2016; CoRE 2017; 2018). If I were starting the study again I might have started in a different place, not looking at the details of teachers' planning but rather hypothesising the curriculum decisions of teachers in light of an established framework, informed by cultural structure. This would have been different to Gearon's (2014) extensive analysis of the impact of different philosophies on education generally and RE in particular, as he rightly deals with the conscious aspects of human thought. Rather, I would have explored the internalised cultural ideas that present themselves as axiomatic to RE teachers and the impact those ideas had on RE planning. It would be interesting to apply such a research model to those involved in RE nationally as a way of understanding better the CoRE (2017; 2018) reports' construction of the 'problem' of RE and the Commission's solutions.

On reflection, the issue I increasingly identified is probably less to do with the mechanics of planning, or lack thereof, but teachers' anthropologies. Perhaps that could have been the place to start. I am minded here of Geertz's (1977) view that anthropology challenges the assumption that there is a universal human nature, rather there are natures. Listening to the teachers made me want to further explore this aspect of the research, in that four of them expressed the view that pupils were either broadly (naturally) religious or non-religious on the basis of their ethnicity. This unacknowledged assumption underpins not only classroom practice but also curriculum planning.

There is an apocryphal story I was told when I first lived in Ireland. A man was thumbing a lift to Dublin and a car stopped. The driver asked, 'Where are you going?' the hitchhiker replied, 'Dublin'. The driver thought for a minute and said, 'To be honest, if I was going to Dublin I wouldn't start from here.' Looking back, I might have started in a different place with different questions. However, I believe that the research speaks for itself and that it makes a contribution at the socio-cultural level, which can help better inform an analysis of cultural structure. As religious education continues to be a contested space in the curriculum, not only in England but across the globe this research points to the need for a proper sociology of religious education in

its own right and the thesis will be a springboard for that, as I move forward in future research.

Appendix 1: Curriculum Interview Questions

How it came about

Can you explain to me how the current Year 8 scheme of work came about?

Avenues to explore:

- Your involvement?
- How long was the process?
- Was it adapted from a previous scheme of work?
- Influences?
- Curriculum continuity

Curriculum progression

How does Year 8 build on Year 7 and into Year 9?

Avenues to explore:

- Can you show me where knowledge is built/developed?
- Can you show me where skills are build/developed?
- Do you think there is overall coherence?

Imagined improvement

Are you planning to change the Year 8 plan in the near future?

Avenues to explore

- What prompted the need for change?
- What would the change involve?
- Do you think that this is an ideal curriculum plan for RE?
- What would be your ideal curriculum plan be at KS3?
- What would that look like for Year 8?

- What is stopping you from putting that plan in place?

Appendix 2: Biography – suggested written task

The purpose of the biography is to look at how you and why you became an RE teacher. There is no specific structure to the biography, although it might be worth approaching it chronologically. You, though, might consider addressing the following though in your biographical account:

- When did your interest in religion develop and why?
- When and why did you become interested in becoming a religious educator?
- Why do you continue as an RE teacher?

There is no word limit to this task but I would ask that the piece is no less than 1000 words. It is an opportunity for you to tell your story.

Biography – interview questions

Tell me about your upbringing. Did you have a religious upbringing?

Avenues to explore:

- Nature of faith background
- Current faith commitments

Can you tell me about the RE you experienced as a pupil?

Avenues to explore:

- Primary RE – what was learned
- Secondary RE – what was learned
- Significant people or person

Tell me about your academic background?

Avenues to explore:

- Nature of the degree

- Specific topics/subjects that stood out

Why did you become a teacher of RE?

Avenues to explore:

- Intended to become an RE teacher
- Did not intend to become an RE teacher

What did you do as part of your PGCE?

Avenues to explore:

- Topics covered
- Placement schools
- People that were tutors, university and school based

Post qualification where did you work?

Avenues to explore:

- Breadth of experience
- Responsibilities
- Post qualification CPD

How did you come to be at this school?

Avenues to explore:

- The purpose of the appointment
- Change over time

How would you know RE had been a success in your school?

Avenues to explore

- Academic success
- RE's contribution to the education of a pupil

Appendix 3: Curriculum plan interview codes

Primary code and additional sub-codes added after interviews

- historic planning documents
- current curriculum requirements – such as agreed syllabuses or diocesan syllabuses
- purpose of RE
- team or team decisions – such as departmental collaboration
- inspection, Ofsted Section 5 and Section 42
- advice
- governors and/or SLT oversight
- to own commitments
 - to own commitments about what pupils should know
 - to own commitment about the skills pupils should have
 - to the purpose of the subject as whole
- to pupils
- to parents

Secondary codes – and additional sub-codes

- type of school
- self initiated planning
- resources
- influence
 - academic background
 - religious background
 - professional background
 - public examinations
- Constraints of the school
- Compromise between different voices
- Local knowledge

- Responding to pupils attitude to RE
- Recognition of local demography and impact on planning.

Appendix 4: Autobiographical interview coding key

Primary Codes and additional sub-codes added at the end of interviews

References to:

- experience of RE as a child/young person
 - what was enjoyed
 - experience of a resource
- stories about a teacher of significance
- ‘faith’ background
 - what was significant, such as aesthetic experience
 - religious experience
- ‘faith’ commitments
- personal commitment to explore religion
- academic background
 - reflection on academic study and its impact on teaching
 - Reflection on own study for the purpose of teaching
- teacher training background
 - experience of the agency of others
 - CPD as a teacher
- experience as a teacher in the school or a previous school(s)
 - colleagues
 - pupils
 - parents
 - locality
- overall philosophy of education – articulation of purpose
- beliefs about the purpose of RE
 - beliefs about what is desirable and possible in RE
 - what happens in RE as part of its purpose
 - problems with RE

Secondary codes and additional sub-codes

References to:

- overall context in which experience is situated
 - professional reflection on context and what is or is not possible/desirable
 - Historical context
- significant experience
 - reflecting on being a child /young person
 - emotional response in the present
- experience as an inspector
- broader institutional
 - government/Ofsted
- own aspirations
- What the teacher simply enjoys

Appendix 5: sample of one interview with coding

Interview part 1

Firstly can I thank you so much for sending your biography, I would like to pick you up obviously on your use of semi colons. And it was really fascinating to read, absolutely fascinating. But can I ask some questions about it and then when we come back later on then too, I've got lots of questions, 11 questions I think came out of it you know, really interesting. So we might go back to look at some of those questions in more detail later. One of the things I found really fascinating in your biography was Mr Morecambe. I'll come back on to Mr Morecambe and the sort of person he was later on if that's okay. But what I'm interested in is in terms of your RE from sort of year 7 onwards to 9 or 11 ... you did GCSE didn't you?

- Yes

So can you remember what you did in RE between year 7 and year 9?

- Its very vague, the memories I have of RE are mainly linked to the lessons I had with Mr Morecambe. But the early RE I don't think we had. No we had one RE teacher and a lot of it was working from a textbook and working through tasks. I remember doing lots of textbook work. Looking at its so vague, can I remember, textbook, a little bit of discussion, not very much. I don't remember any of the topics that I would have studied, I don't remember, I remember symbols, I remember the Buddhist symbols, I remember looking at umm, what else, and being in dark room and there was just you know some nice posters up, I remember that. I don't actually remember what we had to learn, but I liked the ideas, I enjoyed learning about some of the text and some of the books and in fact we were allowed back then to have text books at home so I used to quite often go home and open up my RE text books and work through, RE and geography, they were two of my favourites. But RE wasn't really that significant until Mr Morecambe came along. So I could probably give you more details about my GCSE lessons but 7 to 9 is a little bit of a vague.

Can you remember what the book looked like?

- Yes I can, there was a book, there were several books. There was one by Keene was it Michael Keene, (Note: New Steps in Religious Education by

Michael Keene was a widely used resource in the late 1990s and early 2000s).

- I remember Michael Keene's books and I remember the text in there and I always felt that I learnt a lot from a lot of the information in there. And there were some really basics books that had lots of images and tasks, a little bit of information, pictures and I love those little boxes that you could work through the tasks, I used to love doing that and I'd love and what I liked about taking things home was that I could work at my speed, cos in the classroom you have to go at the speed of the class. And I went to a school that was quite diverse I suppose, well actually no it wasn't in my year, so don't remember much conversation, just working through the text books. (Note: Interesting aside about the lack of diversity in the class and therefore opportunity in RE.)

So tell me about the content then in terms of GCSE?

- OK, GCSE, was Christianity and Islam the two main units and it was very text based. We had to study lots of text and I really liked that. About worship, it was sort of the world religions course as apposed to the philosophy and ethics that everyone teaches now. Learning about prayer in different, and I loved learning about different denominations, I love learning about Islam because it was the first time I actually studied Islam, at a basic level. Learning about 5 pillars and we used to constantly, we came sort of alive in the those lessons, and the topics that we had to study were very text based, that's what I remember, looking at practices and beliefs and looking at the actual Old ... New Testament ... Qur'anic quotes, which actually I'd never done before and I quite liked that. Cos everything my experience of reading religious text is going to the mosque and reading it Arabic and not having a clue about what you just you know there was a sense of I liked doing that, I liked reciting some of the Arabic because its actually quite beautiful but in school reading the English and then reading Biblical text and actually having to try and work out what it all means for ourselves was just so much better. And we had a really good RE group, it was a tough school, it wasn't it was at the bottom of the league table in the whole of Southshire so it wasn't an easy but we had a few weak students, a few students that struggled with RE but we had a such a good relationship with the teacher that every RE lesson was brilliant, every lesson I

felt I was learning something new. And we were exposed to a lot of different ideas and what our teacher we looked at the Sunny Shia divisions, the, what else did we do, oh gosh, I can't, I just remember it being a world religions unit and looking at different aspects of both religions and having to study the Gospels and having to study, we didn't go as far as the hadith but looking at the life of the prophet Mohammed looking, at the life of Jesus, it just opened up a whole new world. I just remember it being ... looking forward to going

(Note: There is a real sense of wonder here and this is communicated in a different way below at an emotional level.)

- the lessons and being sad that it's going to come to an end. That's my memory of RE at GCSE. It was down to our teacher and he was a Baptist preacher, he was an evangelical Christian and he was very passionate and he used to teach almost like a preacher and we loved it, we thought it was great. To have that sort of style of teaching because it was very different from everything else. He encouraged us to question and think about what we were learning about and the was another thing that we loved as a class, we loved challenging our teacher and then asking him questions and fascinated about the fact that there is this Christian Baptist teacher who knows so much about our faith, this is so cool. And as a child you don't come across that and you just think, oh the only people that know about the faith are those imams and the people who are religious leaders and they look a particular way and they dress a particular way and I think what that did was discussing and talking about whatever topic we were on the fact that we were able to do that freely was a different way of learning about religion that I experienced at home, and that's (Note: This refers to the context created by the teacher and is in some ways part of that. It is a significant experience but it is reflective about the opportunities of being a child at school and may be part of the motivation to teach RE.)

You said something interesting there about your reciting the Qur'an in Arabic and understanding it was a bit like and then you stopped.

- I feel like when you are reciting, when I listen to Hebrew and I listen to Aramaic and I listen to the old and the new in the Qur'an being recited in its

original language there's a beauty in it. And I think that's one aspect of religious text and I think it's really moving but I feel that what I did at GCSE was learn about what the scriptures actually mean and that's more intellectual and I enjoyed that but the actual experiential stuff is quite powerful and I don't think I'd be able to learn about the faith in that way in class cos it's so personal and it's really kind of gets to the heart but when you intellectualise when you are reading in English in your own spoken language and you're having to discuss it there's a sense of freedom in a way that I couldn't if I was in the mosque or even in a church. I feel that there's a sense of connecting with the divine and that doesn't require talking about what does this mean, it can come to you and go ... but within the classroom it's different, you can have the discussion you can talk to your friends and so I like that I like both but I don't think you can do the two in a classroom environment in front of all your friends. And have the experiential cos I think it's very very spiritual, it's very powerful. I like the balance of the two, I think it's important to have the two. But I don't know how I could teach that as an RE teacher now. The real power in the words is something that comes from home maybe, I don't know. (Note: The concept of the spiritual comes up seven times across the interview. Experience too is a real feature of the narrative as it unfolds. There is a deep connection between the teacher's own experience, encounter with the spiritual and what she wants for pupils, but this comes at a cost in terms of thinking about crossing professional boundaries).

So do you think there's a sort of power in the words even though you don't understand them

- Yeah I do and I feel it in other scriptures as well, I don't just feel it with the Qur'an I feel that there is something in the scriptures that really pull the spiritual heart if you see what I mean and it makes me quite emotional.

There's nothing wrong with emotion.

- I can't talk about it. That's why I kind of stopped I think.

Because there's something almost visceral

- Yes

And would you say because I don't want to put words into your mouth but there's something about the aesthetic

- Yes, definitely, for me.

Do you need a moment? (Note: the teacher starts to cry at this point)

- I'm alright, that's why I can't do it in the classroom because I think its

So do you think actually then because there has been in the past a whole school of religious education, something referred to as the third way sometimes which was about religious education should actually enable pupils to have some sort of recognition of the spiritual within the classroom context. Would you then avoid that because, is your curriculum offer shaped because of the way you experience religion?

- (Note: Professional Reflection) I think I can talk I know I can talk to my classes about some of the ... if they ask me I'm very open about it but I know in a professional capacity I will be ... I won't ... I will try and guide my inner feelings but sometimes it can not come out but they can see that its powerful, but I try not to give too much as I always say that it is very very personal and you know for example my year 13's are learning about religious language and we are talking about the power of language and how language can be simplified and then you know different people read words and key words in different ways. And we had this sort of conversation so I think it depends on the maturity of the class and the types of students I have and their own experiences so I have to wait and see what my students are like but I wouldn't say it prevents me from bringing in this aspect because I think this is really important especially for my non religious students to understand how much of an impact real sort of spiritual practice can have on the individual especially those who don't understand it so I think its important to give them some understanding but it needs to be balanced, when you are around your own peers its difficult to, one of my year 13 girls is not religious at all but she said to me Miss every lesson every philosophy and ethics lesson is like I'm having a religious experience. (see the 4 comment above) And actually I think maybe I do without realising it ... take and bring in the spiritual side of anything we are talking about, what does it mean to us as human beings and how do we take these teachings, what do we do with it as humans, now that you've learnt

it has it had an impact on the way you think ... so I suppose I do actually I do bring that in but its driven by me not necessarily the curriculum so in some of my lessons that I plan for year 7 and 8 for example the reason for bringing in Philosophy and Ethics is to give the children to opportunity to reflect on the religious teaching, (Note: Here there is a distinction between the curriculum and the teacher. This is a theme to explore when analysing the two interviews as a whole. Ref: hidden curriculum. Note also the contradiction – not curriculum but planned curriculum opportunities.)

- to have the opportunity to have that discussion about what does it mean to be human what do we mean by reality and introduce some complex idea and maybe that has been driven by my own understanding of how religion should be taught, and I think it should be a balance, so I think I am doing it without realising. But I'm aware that I'm teaching in a school where I've got children from so many different backgrounds, so I want to make it really inclusive as possible so nobody feels left out. But then it can take away the depth when you do it like that, but if it means my students are coming out of their lessons thinking and continuing to think about their own inner questions for me that's probably more important. (Note: not the need to compromise in light of context.)

(My aside: I could see your year 12 coming in saying he's made Miss cry. He's done something horrible, he's made Miss cry.)

When you went on then to 6th form and you did Christianity and Islam, Philosophy and Ethics

- Philosophy and Islam, so they used to teach Mark's Gospel and John's Gospel and our new teacher came in and changed it because they felt that there were a lot of student, South Midtown had a quite a percentage of Muslim students and so I think it was quite a good way of convincing some of us to carry on with it and also philosophy is something that's we're always told you shouldn't ask questions about God, that's wrong, and so it was always a difficult one but it was quite interesting, but yes that's what I studied, Philosophy and Ethics and Islam.

So we mentioned that in our last interview, yes we did. But can I ask you ... you went to Otter to do Religious Studies, Theology and Religious Studies?

- Just Religious Studies. There was a Theology course and a Religious Studies course so I studied I did the World Religions, looking at different ...

So can you tell me what you studied?

- Yes so in my first year I remember studying, philosophy of religion, introduction to Indian religions, we studied all the way across from Hinduism to Jainism. I think I studied anthropology and religion, looking at psychology and psychology and sociology of religion. And then a unit on introduction to Islam I think it was, I think the anthropology and the psychology was sort of all in one but there were 4 main units from what I can remember.

My second year, oh gosh, this is where I forget. Do you know I can't remember, sorry I know in my 3rd year I studied Christology, in my second year I studied medieval philosophy I picked a lot of philosophy units because I liked them, Islamic law which was at SOAS, I studied um ...

Did you do jurisprudence and ...?

- Jurisprudence ... yes, and that sort of stuff. Do you know I can't remember, and then obviously there was a dissertation on my dissertation was on polygamy, so again on Islam again. And I think I did Indian philosophy that was hard, I remember that being very difficult. Do you know I can't remember the rest ...

That's OK, and the 3rd year.

- The 3rd year was my dissertation, Christology and I would have been another philosophy unit and I can't remember what area.

I know this is maybe an odd question, it may feel an odd question, but I was wondering to what extent do you feel that what you did at Otter in that Religious Studies has helped to inform the way you feel about curriculum or plan curriculum?

- I've not thought about it like that. (Note: The question arises that if it had never occurred did it not have an impact, is what is 'produced' a reflection of own school experience?) I think my interest in world religions and making

sure we're teaching other world religions equally, that's probably what it's
 given me because my early experiences of teaching and in both my previous
 schools they were very reluctant to teach outside of Christianity. And I felt I
 had the knowledge and the confidence and the expertise to say to my
 colleagues, no we should, although not always I wasn't always listened to but
 I always felt we live in a diverse community, we have people from all
 different cultures and we should be teaching Judaism, Christianity, Islam and
 the Indian religions at the very least but obviously there was always that
 debate. You can't really give the children the depth if you try to teach all of it
 but my feelings ... that I think the reason why I can't remember very much of
 my year 7-9 RE is because it predominately Christian and we touched on some
 of the world religions and sometimes I feel that does Christianity a bit of a
 disservice because the children feel they are exposed, they've got friends from
 different religions, why are we not learning about this. (Note: reflection on
 question leads to a new position.) So I think my degree has definitely had an
 influence the way I think about teaching RE definitely. And even if I can't
 teach, so in my previous school, although it was a secular state school it was
 predominately Christian curriculum so we looked at Christianity different
 aspects, I loved teaching it but quite often the children used to say Miss when
 are we going to learn about another religion. When are we going to learn,
 something, anything, they weren't too bothered about what religion, they just
 wanted to learn about something different. And I said well we've got to look
 at, and what I would do was compare and just use my knowledge to say well
 actually if you look at Indian philosophy and if you look at Jewish philosophy
 or if you look at some of the scriptures in other traditions, so I'd bring in using
 my own knowledge but I couldn't really teach the content in that way. But I
 would use my own knowledge to talk about it. So I think that's really served
 me and it's given me, actually that degree has made me stand out amongst my
 colleagues who are predominately on Old and New Testament but and really
 very knowledgeable but just don't understand how to connect some of those
 teachings in with other traditions and well there's a lot of similarity why can't
 we ... why would you be uncomfortable about teaching other faiths? So that's
 probably given me the confidence to be able to say ok, even if I don't
 understand I'm quite happy to study it myself and say right let's understand

this, lets get our head around it. Whether it's Hinduism, whether it's Buddhism, whether it's Judaism, whether it's ... you know even recently the children say we want to learn more about Humanism cos there are children in our school who are Humanists. And I said let's learn about it first, let's understand it and we will come up with some really good ideas about how we are going to put this across. So I think the degree has given me that confidence to take anything on rather than just sit in my comfort zone which I've noticed that a lot of in my previous years of experience teaching RE a lot of my colleagues want to just they are uncomfortable about moving out of whichever religion they feel comfortable teaching, they want to stick to that and I don't think that's a good thing as an RE teacher.

That's brilliant, I think we need to come to an end now cos we've just heard a bell. So this is end of part one.

Initial Coding: Autobiographical interview coding key

References to:

- experience of RE as a child/young person
 - what was enjoyed
 - experience of a resource
- stories about a teacher of significance
- 'faith' background
 - what was significant, such as aesthetic experience
 - religious experience
- 'faith' commitments
- academic background
- teacher training background
 - experience of the agency of others
- experience as a teacher in the school or a previous school(s)
- overall philosophy of education – articulation of purpose
- beliefs about the purpose of RE
 - beliefs about what is desirable and possible in RE
 - what happens in RE as part of its purpose

In addition reference to:

- overall context in which experience is situated
 - professional reflection on context and what is or is not possible/desirable
 - Historical context
- significant experience
 - reflecting on being a child /young person
 - emotional response in the present
- experience as an inspector
- broader institutional
- own aspirations

Appendix 6: sample of letter sent to teachers inviting them to be part of the research project

Address of school

PhD research project

Date

Dear

A study into the way that religious education teachers in English secondary schools construct the curriculum for their pupils and what influences their decisions.

My research and your professional development

I would like to invite you to be a part of my research into how secondary RE teachers make decisions about what to teach in RE. It is hoped that this research will not only reveal something of the process of curriculum design but also have a positive professional benefit for you and for your school. As part of the research you will be given a framework that you can apply to analysing your own professional practice – indeed the methodology has been used in a different context to great effect. The research process will also help you to become more critical about your curriculum practice as a teacher.

Finally, it will be an opportunity to see your curriculum practice in a much wider context – enabling you to situate your practice historically, socially and educationally. I am also more than happy to support you with any M-Level work you are currently engaged with.

Something about me

I am currently a doctoral research student at Warwick University at the Centre for Education Studies, within the School of Social Science. My interest in RE comes from a professional career in the subject. I qualified in 1982 and taught until becoming a local authority adviser and inspector in 1997, a role last year. I have also published widely on RE, been a senior examiner for A Level and GCSE RS and a lecturer in Education, Theology and Religious Studies.

What is it all about?

Given the current changes occurring in education much of what was taken for granted in terms of planning has changed. So, as you can see from the title above, I am looking at what influences come to play when secondary RE teachers plan the curriculum for their pupils in this new educational landscape.

What is involved?

The research consists of a number of different elements, these are best summarised as:

1. Two interviews with you as a teacher. These will be take place in 201X but the exact timetable is still to be determined. Each interview will last for 60 – 90 minutes and will be recorded for analysis. The first interview will focus on your Year 8 scheme of work and there will be a discussion around that document. The second interview will be broader, focussing on issues such as how you became an RE teacher and your own professional career.
2. Putting your curriculum planning into the context of your school. This is will involve publically available data about your school and any data that the school believes might be significant in understanding the particular curriculum offer that it makes.

Your school will be one of five case studies. Each case study will be analysed according to a common framework and against a theoretical model. All of the case studies will be fully anonymous, no case study will involve interviews with pupils and there will be no contact with pupils during the process. It is also important to note that this research will not be making a judgement about the curriculum offer for Year 8 in your school, it will be analysing the process by which the curriculum offer comes into being.

Ethical approval and academic supervision

This research programme has been approved by the University of Warwick and fulfils the ethical requirements of the university. Interviews and document analysis will be done in accordance of the research standards of the British Sociological Association and the British Educational Research Association.

Contact me

If you are interested in participating in this research could you please get in touch with me by e-mailing: p.d.g.hampshire@warwick.ac.uk in the first instance. If you would like to have a conversation about what being involved in this research means please feel free to call me on XXXXX XXXXXX.

Yours faithfully,

Patrick Hampshire MA BD Cert Ed
Doctoral candidate

List of Abbreviations

A Level	General Certificate of Education Advanced Level
AT	Attainment Target
BAME	British, Asian and Minority Ethnic
CEO	Chief Executive Office
Cert.Ed.	Certificate in Education (undergraduate)
CofE	Church of England
CoRE	Commission on Religious Education
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DES	Department for Education and Science
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Schools
Ebacc	English Baccalaureate
ERA	Education Reform Act
EU	European Union
FBV	Fundamental British Values
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GTE	General Teaching Council
HEC	Health and Education Care Plan
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector
HT	Half term
IFN	Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
KS	Key Stage
LA	Local Authority
MAT	Multi Academy Trust
MEG	Midland Examinations Group
NASACRE	National Association of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education
NATRE	National Association of RE Teachers

NCLT	National College for Teaching and Leadership
NFRE	National Framework for Religious Education
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OCR	Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts Examinations Board
Ofqual	Office for Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
P4C	Philosophy for Children
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
Progress 8	Attainment of a pupils according to their 8 best GCSE results
PSHE	Personal, Social and Health Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QCDA	Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
RE	Religious Education
REC	Religious Education Council of England and Wales
REDCo	Religious Diversity and Education in Europe
REQM	Religious Education Quality Mark
RPE	Religion, Philosophy and Ethics
RS	Religious Studies
SACRE	Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education
SCAA	Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SIAMS	Statutory Inspections of Anglican and Methodist Schools
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SMSC	Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development
SOES	Social Origins of Educational Systems
SRS	Social and Religious Studies
UC	Understanding Christianity

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Και όλοι έζησαν ευτυχώς πάντα μετά.